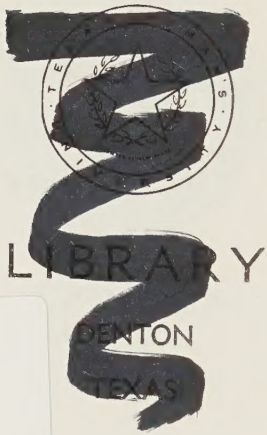
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GAY'S

BEGGAR'S OPERA

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JOHN GAY

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"In the portraits of the literary worthies of the early part of the last century, Gay's face is the pleasantest perhaps of all." *Thackeray.*

GAY'S BEGGAR'S OPERA

ITS CONTENT HISTORY & INFLUENCE

By William Eben Schultz, Ph.D.

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The present volume is the third work published by the Yale University Press on the Oliver Baty Cunningham Memorial Publication Fund. This Foundation was established May 8, 1920, by a gift from Frank S. Cunningham, Esq., of Chicago, to Yale University, in memory of his son, Captain Oliver Baty Cunningham, 15th United States Field Artillery, who was born in Chicago, September 17, 1894, and was graduated from Yale College in the Class of 1917. As an undergraduate he was distinguished alike for high scholarship and for proved capacity for leadership among his fellows, as evidenced by his selection as Gordon Brown Prize Man from his class. He received his commission as Second Lieutenant, United States Field Artillery, at the First Officers' Training Camp at Fort Sheridan, and in December, 1917, was detailed abroad for service, receiving subsequently the Distinguished Service Medal. He was killed while on active duty near Thiaucourt, France, on September 17, 1918, the twenty-fourth anniversary of his birth.

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To Laura Piner Schultz and to the memory of John Christian Schultz, who made possible my work with books.

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PREFACE

NOT much special work has been done on English drama of the time from 1725 to 1750. To the student of eighteenth-century writing, however, no period furnishes more interesting literary development. The present treatise attempts to bring together a considerable body of material illustrative of one important play, *The Beggar's Opera.*

Gay's musical comedy has never been a dead issue from the night of its production on the stage. Its long theatrical career has brought many prominent actors, authors, biographers, and historians, as well as important people not connected with the drama, at some time or other within the circle of its influence. Recent interest in the play, aside from its late revivals, with their consequent publications, is shown by the consideration it has received at the hands of editors like Sarrazin (1898), Macleod (1905), Calmus (1912), and the Tuppers (1914); and of C. E. Pearce (1913), who found opportunity to write a large book about Lavinia Fenton and the piece that brought her fame. Old as it is, *The Beggar's Opera* occupies a unique position, and lends itself to present serious treatment. It is inseparably bound up with the life of the London theatres, and obviously no history of the English stage could be complete without it.

Though *The Beggar's Opera* has often been reprinted, it has lacked definite treatment from a historical and critical standpoint. The early information about the play is fragmentary, and the facts have rarely been combined. Many statements, once taken for granted, have preserved inaccuracies in several details. Meanwhile, a great many scattered and conflicting remarks have been made about the piece. Certain conventionalisms, through borrowings from book to book without credit, have gained currency and have been repeated with no effort to follow statements to their original sources.

The present volume aims to collect the salient information regarding *The Beggar's Opera,* arranged for the purpose of an intensive and consistent view of the content, history, and influence of Gay's chief dramatic work. If the investigation has been worth while, it is per-

haps mainly because it seeks, by first-hand research, to get at the original documents bearing on the play. Much early evidence is found in the newspapers, magazines, letters, memoirs, pamphlets, and general literature around 1728. Actors' journals, though frequently unreliable, have often proved to be rich sources of information. Their general facts, if not all their minor details, have been found to agree. By means of the letters sent between Gay, Pope, and Swift we can verify many points about the early and inside history of the play at regular, and often the most important, intervals. Almost every communication of theirs close after the first performance, and even before, has some word about *The Beggar's Opera*. To settle old questions, or raise new ones, it has been found necessary to quote a large amount of material from such contemporary documents. These quotations are usually allowed to remain in their quaint, inconsistent dress of eighteenth-century print. Sometimes it has been sufficient to let such striking early statements stand alone, without further comment. Many of them are assembled here from various and generally inaccessible sources, and are reproduced for the first time. Some of the information gained in this way is likely to be unreliable, or incomplete, but at least it has the value of coming close to *The Beggar's Opera*. The constant popularity of the piece—it was never quite out of the public eye—has afforded a peculiarly good viewpoint from which to test its endurance as a stage play over a stretch of nearly two hundred years.

To the use of the rare collection of eighteenth-century dramatic materials in the library of Yale University, I have fortunately been able to add the consultation of many old works in the British Museum, and, above all, the extremely valuable list of plays and pamphlets owned by the late Mr. E. L. Gay, of Boston. I have also had occasion to make use, along with some of minor importance, of the following libraries of the world: Bodleian, Oxford; King's College and Trinity College, Cambridge; University of Glasgow; Public Library, Birmingham; Forster and Dyce Collections, Kensington; Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris; University of Leipzig; Harvard University; Columbia University; University of Chicago; Library of Congress; New York Public Library; Boston Public Library.

It is my pleasure to make specific mention of three persons who

have given me assistance. First of all, to Professor George Henry Nettleton, in whose course in Eighteenth Century Drama, over ten years ago, this subject was first proposed, I am especially indebted; both for two works which include suggestive treatment of this play and its environment, and, chiefly, for personal presentation of the same material, and valuable directions and criticisms generously offered. In the second place, I was highly favored with the personal friendship of the late Mr. Ernest L. Gay, of Boston, whose kindness during a period of four years was constant. Not only did he allow access to his private library, but he was ready to send, at my desire, many rare books for examination. The contents of this work remind me, on almost every page, of the contemporary materials which I have found only in his possession. Here was a booklover extraordinary, and a man of genuine critical insight and scholarly taste. It is with a touch of sadness that this work, much of which he had examined in preliminary form, is published after his death. My brother, Dr. J. R. Schultz, of Allegheny College, has been of considerable help in general consultation, and also in proof reading. As to broader assistance, the officials of the Yale Library, during the long time I was ransacking many of the volumes in their care, afforded me every possible convenience and aid. The courtesies of other librarians, in this country and abroad, seem further proof that those who work with books are usually the gentlest and most serviceable of men.

A portion of this book was presented nearly eight years ago in connection with an edition of *The Beggar's Opera* offered as a dissertation in candidacy for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Yale University. Since that time much valuable information has been discovered and the materials which comprised the original part of the work now stand revised and enlarged. Many new chapters have been added entirely. Two further studies—an edition of *The Beggar's Opera,* giving a text of the first issue, with variant collations and explanatory and illustrative notes; and a descriptive bibliography of the many reprints of the play—will complete this series of publications dealing with Gay's famous piece.

It is only fair to both reader and author for me to say that this book, in full, was in the hands of the publisher several months before Mr. Frank Kidson's lately printed little volume dealing with Gay's

opera came from the press. As the date of preface will indicate, recent developments in current stage history were allowed inclusion; but the present text has in no way been modified on account of the appearance of this other and much smaller work on the same subject. All of the chapters except those concerning the modern stage were complete in 1921; most of them were prepared long before the revival of 1920 and the subsequent renewal of public interest in Gay's classic. Publication has been intentionally withheld for the purpose of bringing the unique history of the play (now again in the making) down to the latest possible date.

While I cannot expect that every person into whose hands this book may fall will have read *The Beggar's Opera,* or seen it acted, my treatment, almost unconsciously, presupposes some familiarity with the play that here receives so much consideration in various ways. Again, to understand *The Beggar's Opera* properly, and to appreciate fully the circumstances of its production and effect, one should review the life, work, and character of the man who wrote it. Knowledge of the author should accompany, if not precede, acquaintance with his popular success of 1728. So many elements enter into the literary background of the original ballad opera that definite biographical facts must constantly be borne in mind. I have included as many personal references as possible without forgetting the major aim of the volume. The most modern accounts of the dramatist are those of Austin Dobson (*Dictionary of National Biography*), John Underhill (Muses' Library edition), and Lewis Melville (*Life and Letters of John Gay,* 1921).

In a work like this, so full of dates, titles, and quotations, there is naturally a ready chance for errors in detail; and the author can only hope his pages are as free from them as possible. Correction of even the smallest misstatement of fact will be heartily welcomed at this end of the line. The task of correcting the mistakes of former writers has been attempted; let those who discover the mistakes of the present writer make their findings known. In the quotations from contemporary documents, careful proof reading, at a distance from the originals, may not have been sufficiently awake to give a perfect copy of peculiarities in spelling, punctuation, capitalization, or italics, though such exactness is of historic value. But as Professor Page has

so aptly quoted in the introduction to his *British Poets of the Nineteenth Century,* "Tu excuseras les fautes de l'imprimeur, car tous les yeux d'Argus n'y verraient assez clair."

A volume of this size and scope requires certain mechanical devices for convenience. In the notes and the tabulated lists of ballad operas and songs, abbreviated forms are often used for references to books, instead of full titles, with places and dates of publication. All such items are given complete in the bibliography. For two standard works frequently mentioned the following equivalents have been adopted: *D.N.B.,* for *Dictionary of National Biography;* Genest, for his *Some Account of the English Stage.* Other symbols employed are: B.M., for British Museum; D.L., for Drury Lane theatre; C.G., for Covent Garden theatre; Hay., for Haymarket theatre; L.I.F., for Lincoln's Inn Fields theatre; ed., for edition; *ante,* for reference to preceding pages in this volume; and *post,* for reference to subsequent pages in this volume. Page numbers in the first edition are used for references to the text of *The Beggar's Opera.* The numerous quotations from letters of Gay, Pope, Swift, etc., are taken, almost without exception, from Elwin and Courthope's edition of Pope, or Ball's *Correspondence of Jonathan Swift.* Only a few specific references to these are recorded.

To one who has become familiar with John Gay, and entered into sympathy with his ways, the last and most significant prefatory thought must be,—the easy-going author would be very much surprised to know what modern treatment his comedy, upon which, to use the language of Pope, he laid no reputation, has undergone, both upon the stage and in print. But I could not send the reader into the following chapters without giving him, along with a word of appreciation for his interest up to the end of the preface, this timely quotation from *Mist's Weekly Journal,* written as long ago as Saturday, July 13, 1728: "The following learned letter comes out of one of our Universities, being of Piece of Criticism, after the manner of the moderns. . . . I presume it is only sent by way of specimen of some other works designed, and if the learned world should receive it well, I make no doubt but the ingenious Author will proceed to other studies of the like importance to the Publick, and, perhaps, give us a Comment upon all the Songs in the Beggar's Opera, that neither the

present Age nor Posterity may be deceived in the true meaning of the text."

W. E. S.

Culver-Stockton College,
Canton, Missouri,
January, 1923.

INTRODUCTION

THE history of *The Beggar's Opera,* early and late, is indeed eventful. Running for sixty-two nights in the first season, the record for that time, the play continued its popularity and was performed more than any other piece during the eighteenth century. In fact, there is some record of its appearance in nearly every year between 1728 and 1886. The opening performance was attended by Pope and others of distinction, and eagerly followed by Swift in Ireland. At once the opera made Rich gay and Gay rich, as their contemporaries said. It produced, in 1728 and after, a flood of occasional literature (pamphlets, sermons, letters, newspaper verse) hardly equaled in the case of any other English dramatic production. It was preached against from pulpits and brought forth newspaper criticism that was both antagonistic and complimentary to an extravagant degree. That its satire could force a great Prime Minister, Sir Robert Walpole, into applause to turn the thrust, is evidence of its expected influence among even a first-night audience. The opera became the means, indirectly, of causing disruptions in King George's court itself. With its sequel, *Polly,* it helped to bring on the dramatic censorship of 1737. It practically drove Italian opera from London for a season, in open competition, and gave it a setback from which it did not recover for ten years. A breaker of dramatic traditions, it introduced into England, under fashionable patronage that became a fad, a ballad opera type that has survived to the present day in almost anything we call musical comedy. It was also to be one of the first musical plays performed in America.

On the purely theatrical side, the long career of *The Beggar's Opera* sounds like romance. Prominent actresses contested privately and in public print for the part of Polly, and many aspired to be Macheath. Nearly every actress in the leading female rôle made her fame and fortune through the piece. Actors, whether they could sing or not, were constantly eager to perform the hero highwayman, or even lesser characters; and singers who did not know how to act often dared to assume the rôle. Both men and women became better

known by playing parts in *The Beggar's Opera,* or were drawn by them from obscurity into distinction. Some who were led into the business of the opera had previously performed leading parts in standard plays, not excluding Shakespeare. The number of different actors in Gay's piece is astonishing. The variety of the casts in early years (even at one theatre) seems to indicate that almost every actor knew one part or more; the piece was played so much that it could probably be put on at short notice. Some of the players took parts "for that night only." Since it was a good acting drama and hence popular and profitable, the performers were not slow to recognize *The Beggar's Opera* as a constant friend.

Under such conditions, *The Beggar's Opera* was played in all possible ways—with omissions, condensations, and additions—and still was liked. It was represented by an inverted cast of men in women's parts and women in men's, once by women entirely, and several times by children, often with individual character inversions in the leading rôles. Meanwhile it held its original reputation as the first popular success on the English stage. The opera kept all kinds of company in its own day,—Shakespeare, farce, pantomime, concert, standard stock plays, and new pieces tried out; and mingled with strange mates in the nineteenth century, under all sorts of interesting circumstances. It was attempted by amateurs, butchered by poor actors, and glorified by the real genius of occasional stars. Long after its birth-year it was repeatedly staged for simultaneous runs at Drury Lane and Covent Garden, in direct rivalry; and it was used, time and again, to begin seasons, close them, or introduce new plays and players. As a favorite for benefit performances, it easily took the lead all through its own century. Meanwhile, whether advertised for a protracted run or a spasmodic benefit performance, it needed no new introduction to the playbills, whereas some other works required such a statement as "not acted for thirty years."

Though the styles in things theatrical changed much as the original run went farther back into the past, and though some concessions were made "to comply with the Taste of the Town," still *The Beggar's Opera* continued to hold its own. It seems to have retained almost primary interest until well after 1800. It also has the enviable record of having succeeded whenever presented by a cast of talent. It has been played in nearly every region where there could be an

English-speaking audience, and now, when it ought to have fairly worn itself out, it has not only refused to die a natural death, but has remained alive in a manner that astonishes the dramatic and musical world. The recent revival in England and the three American seasons are only further interesting events in its remarkably checkered career of good fortune,—for, truly, whatever else we may want to say about the much-played piece, *The Beggar's Opera* was written under a lucky star.

CHAPTER I

THE FIRST SEASON IN LONDON

THE year 1728, which marked the birth of Goldsmith and the publication of the *Dunciad*, was also eventful on account of the production of John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera*. At the Theatre Royal in Lincoln's Inn Fields, on the night of January 29, a new species of drama was shown to London in a play which was to fill out the remainder of the year and close the most important season in the theatrical history of the time.

Gay had taken the piece to Colley Cibber, the manager of Drury Lane, but this experienced theatrical man, somehow thoroughly misjudging the public taste, refused it promptly, with an apparent disdain that now seems almost incredible. Perhaps he should not be blamed for turning away this opera, a queer, new thing which might, by its very novelty, prove a miserable failure. It would not have been strange if it had been damned on the opening night as a species of entertainment which a first audience could not reconcile with conventional models and types. The manager may also have been afraid to risk the satire it contained against court life and possibly the King's chief minister.[1] At any rate, perhaps he justly believed, as Congreve did, that it would succeed greatly or fall flat. It is plain, however, that Pope and his friends, if they tried at all, were not instrumental in convincing Cibber and his colleagues of the advisability of experimenting with *The Beggar's Opera*.

The influence of the Duchess of Queensberry, nevertheless, was

[1] See Chapter XVII.

strong enough to induce John Rich, the manager of Lincoln's Inn Fields, to pay the piece attention, even if he did not welcome it. The poet's benefactress during his whole literary career, she accomplished her chief work of patronage and friendship for the half-helpless author when she volunteered to pay the proprietor for any loss incurred in case of a failure of the play. His speculation being thus reduced to a safe investment, Rich agreed to stage *The Beggar's Opera*. Even then, according to Victor, "it was currently reported, that the happy Manager, who perform'd it, gave it up after the first Rehearsal, and was with some Difficulty prevailed on to make the Trial."[2] Hitchcock agrees with Victor, saying, "It was with great difficulty that Mr. Rich, the manager of Lincoln's-Inn theatre, could be prevailed on to let it have a trial, and after the first rehearsal, he gave it up, as a piece which to a certainty would be condemned."[3] The *Life of Quin* tells of the manager's reluctance, and how he "was prevailed upon to perform Gay's Beggar's Opera."[4]

From other sources come reports of Rich's ready purchase. In *The Seventh Satyre of Juvenal Imitated*[5] we read how Gay

> Full oft was forc'd on empty Praise to dine,
> Till Humour, heighten'd to its utmost Pitch,
> Found out a ready Purchaser in *Rich.*

W. Clark Russell, the novelist, speaks of the wisdom shown by Rich in the acceptance of the piece; but even he says, in another moment, that its success was not anticipated, and that it "was produced at the smallest cost for which it could be put on the stage."[6] Dr. Doran says Rich eagerly accepted.[7] Molloy, following such a statement, is led to believe that Rich took the play and "speedily put it in rehearsal."[8] Pearce, a recent writer on the subject, seems to think that Rich knew in advance the kind of success *The Beggar's Opera* would bring, even if the new style of writing did not then have his full respect. He says Rich was a born showman who understood the

[2] *Hist. of Theatres*, II, 153-154.
[3] *Irish Stage*, I, 40.
[4] P. 26.
[5] London, 1745.
[6] *Representative Actors*, p. 86.
[7] *Annals of Stage*, p. 262.
[8] *Famous Plays*, p. 84.

taste of the public and did not let his prejudice interfere. Indeed, the manager's frequent use of farce and pantomime would lead in the direction of the new musical comedy. Rich can probably be credited, however, with more good luck in the matter than keen insight or literary taste. It is fairly certain that Gay had no personal influence with Rich. None of his former plays had been produced at the Fields, although his *The What d'ye Call It* was once about to be acted there without his consent.

Any doubt on the part of Rich was seconded by the apprehensions of Gay's intimate friends, Pope and Swift, who, after criticizing the opera throughout, still feared concerning its success. They surely did not hesitate on the side of satire; it must have been the innovation of the ballad opera form. Both of these associates, however, were willing to back the new production in every way.

Spence records Pope's account of the first night's performance, when Gay's many friends had gathered to assist him through the trial scenes:

> We were all at the first night of it, in great uncertainty of the event; till we were very much encouraged by overhearing the Duke of Argyle, who sat in the box next to us, say, "it will do,—it must do!—I see it in the eyes of them."—This was a good while before the first act was over, and so gave us ease soon; for the duke, (besides his own good taste) has a more particular knack than any one now living, in discovering the taste of the public. He was quite right in this, as usual; the good nature of the audience appeared stronger and stronger with every act, and ended in a clamour of applause.[9]

Victor, writing in 1730, says that

> on the first Night of Performance, its Fate was doubtful for some Time. The first Act was received with silent Attention, not a Hand moved; at the End of which they rose, and every Man seemed to compare Notes with his Neighbor, and the general Opinion was in its Favor. In the second Act they broke their Silence by Marks of their Approbation, to the great Joy of the frighted Performers, as well as the Author; and the last Act was received with universal Applause.[10]

Although there seems to be no reason except the novelty of the piece for such "silent attention" on the part of the spectators, this account does not conflict with Pope's, unless in the idea of delayed success.

[9] *Anecdotes,* p. 159.
[10] *Hist. of Theatres,* II, 154.

Cooke says, "Macklin was present at the first representation of the Beggar's Opera, and confirmed what has been often reported, that its success was doubtful, till after the opening of the second act, when, after the chorus song of 'Let us take the road,' the applause was as universal as unbounded."[11] This account indicates a slower response than that mentioned by Pope, who was assured of the success of the play sooner, "a good while before the first act was over." Boswell says he was shown by Mr. Cambridge

> that there was good reason enough to doubt concerning its success. He was told by Quin, that during the first night of its appearance it was long in a very dubious state; that there was a disposition to damn it, and that it was saved by the song,
>
> "Oh ponder well! be not severe!"
>
> the audience being much affected by the innocent looks of Polly, when she came to those two lines, which exhibit at once a painful and ridiculous image,
>
> "For on the rope that hangs my Dear,
> Depends poor Polly's life."[12]

Several writers agree with Boswell as to the turning point at the end of this song, which is the twelfth, about two-thirds of the way through Act I. This story sounds plausible, both because of Pope's comment and the earlier position in the play, at a somewhat natural break in the plot. It is not unlikely that some in the audience were struck with Polly's supposed pathetic appeal to her parents, especially when it was sung to a favorite tune. Much of the best dialogue and several of the best songs, however, come before even "Oh, ponder well," and it is strange that the first scenes should have been so utterly disregarded. A disagreement in the early records on this point would be easy enough, and the matter is one not to be definitely decided.

Another side of the original production is described in Oxberry's *Dramatic Biography,* though with no references cited, and therefore with no certain authenticity:

> An Opera without music.
>
> The first night the Beggar's Opera was played at the Lincolns-inn-fields theatre, the audience, not being then much acquainted with the nature of operas, expected the usual music before the drawing up of the curtain—finding them-

[11] *Memoirs of Macklin,* p. 57.

[12] *Life of Johnson,* under date of 1775.

selves (as they imagined) likely to be bilked out of their first and second music, they expressed great disapprobation, insomuch that Jack Hall[13] was sent on to apologise for the omission, by explaining that it was a rule to have no music prior to the overture. Jack made his obeisance with a tolerable grace, but being confounded at the general silence which so suddenly ensued on his appearance, blundered out—"Ladies and gentlemen, we—we—beg you'll not call for first and second music,—because—because you all know, that there is never any music at all in an opera." This bull put the house in good humour, and the piece proceeded.[14]

The best idea we can gain of the interior of the playhouse on this first night is obtained from Hogarth's picture of the prison scene, which apparently shows the stage of the initial performance.[15] The side boxes are full of distinguished persons, among whom John Gay finds his proper place, in the background on the right. Though trying to look unexcited, and even disinterested, he is reading most keenly the different signs of doubt and approval. The stage settings and some of the original costumes can be studied in this picture, which is an accurate piece of contemporary work.

The newspapers of the time did not have much to say in advance about the play which was to make so great a stir outside. The *Daily Journal* for the preceding Saturday, January 27, 1728, had this small and inconspicuous notice at the end of the Lincoln's Inn Fields announcements for Saturday night: "On Monday next will be presented, (Never acted before) The Beggar's Opera." In the same paper, for Monday, January 29, we read:

Never Acted before, By the Company of Comedians, At the Theatre-Royal in Lincoln's-Inn Fields, this present Monday, being the 29th Day of January, will be presented, The Beggar's Opera. Boxes 5s. Pit 3s. Gallery 2s.

On Thursday, February 1, the *Daily Journal* advertised:

The Third Night. By the Company of Comedians, At the Theatre-Royal in Lincoln's-Inn Fields, this present Thursday, being the 1st of February, will be presented, The Beggar's Opera. None to be admitted into the Boxes but by printed Tickets, which will be delivered at the Theatre, at 5s each. Pit 3s. Gallery 2s.

After the performance the reviews were scanty. The *Daily Journal*

[13] The original Lockit.
[14] IV, 177.
[15] See *post*, opposite p. 270.

paid no attention to the piece till Thursday, February 1, in the same issue in which appeared the notice of the third night:

On Monday was represented for the first Time, at the Theatre Royal in Lincoln's Inn Fields, Mr. Gay's new English Opera, written in a Manner wholly new, and very entertaining, there being introduced, instead of Italian Airs, about 60 of the most celebrated old English and Scotch Tunes. There was present then, as well as last Night, a prodigious Concourse of Nobility and Gentry, and no Theatrical Performance for these many Years has met with so much Applause.

The *Craftsman,* the weekly paper, took notice of the piece in its issue of Saturday, February 3, on the day of the fifth performance:

This Week a Dramatick Entertainment has been exhibited at the Theatre in Lincoln's-Inn-Fields, entitled *the Beggar's Opera,* which has met with a general Applause, insomuch that the Waggs say it has made *Rich* very *Gay,* and probably will make *Gay* very *Rich.*

Gay wrote to Swift, on February 15, 1728:

I have deferred writing to you from time to time, till I could give you an account of the Beggar's Opera. It is acted at the playhouse in Lincoln's Inn Fields with such success, that the playhouse hath been crowded every night. To-night is the fifteenth time of acting, and it is thought it will run a fortnight longer. I have ordered Motte to send the play to you the first opportunity. I made no interest either for approbation or money, nor hath anybody been pressed to take tickets for my benefit: notwithstanding which, I think I shall make an addition to my fortune of between six and seven hundred pounds. I know this account will give you pleasure, as I have pushed through this precarious affair without servility or flattery.

Gay's own comment was apparently preceded by the following passage in a letter from Bolingbroke and Pope to Swift, some time early in February, 1728. Pope says in his section:

The only courtiers I know, or have the honor to call my friends, are John Gay and Mr. Bowry; the former is at present so employed in the elevated airs of his opera, and the latter in the exaltation of his high dignity—that of her majesty's waterman—that I can scarce obtain a categorical answer from either to anything I say to them. But the opera succeeds extremely to yours and my extreme satisfaction, of which he promises this post to give you a full account.

Gay wrote to Swift, on March 20, 1728:

The Beggar's Opera hath now been acted thirty-six times, and was as full the last night as the first, and yet there is not the least probability of a thin audi-

ence, though there is a discourse about the town, that the directors of the Royal Academy of Music design to solicit against its being played on the outlandish opera days, as it is now called. On the benefit day of one of the actresses last week, one of the players falling sick, they were obliged to give out another play, or dismiss the audience. A play was given out, but the audience called out for the Beggar's Opera, and they were forced to play it, or the audience would not have stayed.

Further on he says:

There is a mezzotinto print published to-day of Polly, the heroine of the Beggar's Opera, who was before unknown, and is now in so high vogue, that I am in doubt, whether her fame does not surpass that of the opera itself.

Pope wrote to Swift, on March 23, 1728:

Mr. Gay's opera has been acted near forty days running, and will certainly continue the whole season. So he has more than a fence about his thousand pounds; he will soon be thinking of a fence about his two thousand.

In a letter to Gay, on March 28, 1728, Swift says:

The Beggar's Opera has knocked down Gulliver; I hope to see Pope's Dulness knock down the Beggar's Opera, but not till it has fully done its job.

On May 10 Swift was able to write to Pope:

You talk of this Dunciad, but I am impatient to have it *volitare per ora.* There is now a vacancy for fame; the Beggar's Opera has done its task, *discedat uti conviva satur.*

The opera continued its run for sixty-two nights during that season. There have been many statements as to sixty-three nights, and a consecutive number, at that, but both of these points can be disproved. What is responsible for the spread of the two mistakes is probably the note by Pope, or his annotator, to the line in the *Dunciad,* "Gay dies unpension'd with a hundred friends."[16] This brief sketch of the early history of the play has been quoted very frequently, often without any credit to the original source; thus the material has been given wide currency, generally with no verification. With the excessive praise toned down, and with the correction of *sixty-three* and *uninterrupted,* the piece can stand as reliable in its original form.

[16] See Elwin's ed. of Pope, IV, 184; *Dunciad,* Book iii, l. 330.

It will be well to quote here the most of this passage, to which frequent reference will be made. We learn of

> the celebrated Beggar's Opera; a piece of satire which hit all tastes and degrees of men, from those of the highest quality to the very rabble. That verse of Horace
>
> *Primores populi arripuit, populumque tributim,*
>
> could never be so justly applied as to this. The vast success of it was unprecedented, and almost incredible. What is related of the wonderful effects of the ancient music or tragedy hardly comes up to it: Sophocles and Euripides were less follow'd and famous. It was acted in London sixty-three days, uninterrupted; and renew'd the next season with equal applauses. It spread into all the great towns of England, was play'd in many places to the thirtieth and fortieth time, at Bath and Bristol fifty, &c. It made its progress into Wales, Scotland and Ireland, where it was performed twenty-four days together. It was lastly acted in Minorca. The fame of it was not confin'd to the author only; the ladies carry'd about with 'em the favourite songs of it in fans; and houses were furnish'd with it in screens. The person who acted *Polly,* till then obscure, became all at once the favourite of the town; her *pictures* were engraved and sold in great numbers, her *life* written; books of letters and verses to her publish'd; and pamphlets made even of her *sayings* and *jests*. . . . This remarkable period happen'd in the year 1728. Yet so great was his [Gay's] modesty, that he constantly prefixed to all editions of it this motto,—*Nos haec novimus esse nihil.*

The treasurer's book of John Rich, manager of Lincoln's Inn Fields, is a trustworthy source from which to decide certain details. It shows a total of sixty-two performances, and those not consecutive. Genest is right in calling attention to the apparent double mistake, and in saying that the performance of June 19 was the sixty-second time for *The Beggar's Opera,* as well as the last play of the season.[17] The *Life of Quin,* no recent theatrical document, has sixty-two nights, giving thus a fairly early correction of the *Dunciad* note. The *Thespian Dictionary* speaks of sixty-two. That there were intermissions in the long, unprecedented run is shown by the newspapers themselves. The *Daily Journal* notices indicate several interruptions, as on Tuesday, January 30, of the very first week, and between the fortieth and forty-first nights, when there was a skipping from Tuesday, April 2, to Monday, April 8. On April 1, under the advertisement of the fortieth performance, this notice appears: "N.B. To-morrow will be the only Day of this Opera's being performed this Week, on

[17] III, 227.

Account of the Benefits; but the ensuing Week it will be perform'd every Acting Day." This is followed by a notice of Mrs. Chambers' benefit, in *The Double Dealer,* on April 4. April 6 was given over to Walker for his benefit in *Love and a Bottle.* An intermission just as striking occurred before the Easter holidays. The *Daily Journal* for April 12, advertising the performance of April 13, the forty-fourth night, says: "This will be the last Time of Acting till Easter-Holidays." Then comes an announcement for April 22, the benefit of Mons. Salle and Mons. Poitier, in *The Fortune Hunters.* On April 24, the same paper advertises the forty-fifth performance of "Tomorrow, Thursday 25," and says, "This Opera will be performed only on Thursday and Saturday this Week." Genest's lists are enough to show the breaks in the original run, aside from the regular Sunday omissions. He gives as extra parts acted by Miss Fenton between January 29 and June 19, Alinda in *The Pilgrim,* March 14, Ophelia in *Hamlet,* March 18, and Cherry in *The Beaux' Stratagem,* April 29.

If we count up on the calendar we can see at once that neither sixty-two nor sixty-three consecutive nights could possibly be correct. If so, the run of the play, which began on January 29, would have been finished on April 9 or 10, instead of June 19. As a matter of fact, only thirty-two out of sixty-two performances were successive. It seems true, however, that there was no interruption of the steady run by incidental pieces. Cooke says: "In London, nothing stopped its progress through the course of the season, but the benefit nights of the performers."[18] There is this terse statement in the *Life of Quin:* "The season of 1727-8 had been so occupied by The Beggar's Opera, that no new piece was exhibited in which Mr. Quin performed."[19] The same work tells us that

> the run of the Beggar's Opera . . . prompted Quin to leave that theatre, where his talents lay dormant, as he could neither perform the part of Macheath, nor that still more illustrious one of Harlequin, which the manager considered as a more capital part than Hamlet or Cato.[20]

Rich, with an eye to business, prohibited members of his company from using *The Beggar's Opera* for their benefit performances. Though the run was interrupted frequently for these, the pieces

[18] *Memoirs of Macklin,* p. 61.
[19] Supplement, p. 78.
[20] P. 28.

selected were the older plays. One exception was the case of Lavinia Fenton; but she was allowed to have *The Beggar's Opera* only on May 4, the forty-eighth night, although she was the angel of the play. Once an actress, Mrs. Barbier, ventured to advertise, independently, a performance of *The Beggar's Opera* for her benefit. The announcement was immediately corrected by the manager. Two brief notices from the *Daily Journal* will explain. In the issue of February 24 we read:

> For the Benefit of Mrs. Barbier, By the Company of Comedians, At the Theatre-Royal in Lincoln's-Inn-Fields, on Saturday the 16th of March, will be presented, The Beggar's Opera. In which Mrs. Barbier will perform between the Acts Three Opera Songs and Three English Ballets.

In the issue of February 28 (after the advertisement for the twenty-sixth night of the regular run) we read:

> Whereas Mrs. Barbier has advertis'd that the Beggar's Opera is to be perform'd, for her Benefit, on the 16th of March next; This is to inform the Publick, That such Advertisement was published without Consent of Mr. Rich, and that the same will not be allow'd of.

Possibly the actors were satisfied with the proceeds of the substituted plays, for Lincoln's Inn Fields, after *The Beggar's Opera* had got people in the habit of coming there in crowds, kept the interest between times and drew good financial returns. It was the actors at the other houses who were unfortunately affected by the exaltation of this one play.

Whether it was sixty-two or sixty-three nights, the success of *The Beggar's Opera's* first season must be called remarkable. Sixty-two performances in one run would be considered far from extraordinary to-day, but it was unprecedented in 1728, when conditions of the English stage were entirely different and single nights were common and the average run was very short. The receipts were larger than had ever been known before. In fact, this phenomenal record of *The Beggar's Opera* was taken as the test and measure of many later plays, which either succeeded or failed in comparison with Gay's popular piece.

All through the eighteenth century, especially, this opera was a dramatic touchstone, because it had established a landmark in theatrical history. Cibber was making use of its example when he said

that *Cato* "reached not, by full forty Days, the Progress, and Applauses of the Beggar's Opera."[21] Mrs. Pendarves, writing to Swift on April 22, 1736, about the performance of *Pasquin,* speaks of it as having "had almost as long a run as the Beggar's Opera." The run of Sheridan's *The Duenna* (seventy-five nights), almost a half century after, has been repeatedly compared with that of Gay's piece, with the advantage, of course, of a much later period, and consequently a longer run that was not considered phenomenal. The preface to the 1791 edition of *Love in a Village* states that in its success Bickerstaffe's play "was nearly equal to that prodigy of fortune, the Beggar's Opera." Hitchcock compares *The Beggar's Opera* and *George Barnwell* as two pieces of great merit and like "singularity of their first reception."[22]

That Rich had been fairly poor not long before his fortunate find of 1728 is pretty certain. Prior to the appearance of *The Beggar's Opera* he had resorted to all kinds of pantomime entertainments to increase the attendance at Lincoln's Inn Fields, and had succeeded in drawing greater crowds than ever. Before that, however, to quote from the *Life of Quin,*

> from the time of the run of the Merry Wives of Windsor Rich could never fill his house without orders, till he introduced pantomimes, and acted Harlequin himself; or rather till he, with much reluctance, was prevailed upon to perform Gay's Beggar's Opera, which came out in 1727, and had such amazing success.[23]

Therefore it seems that *The Beggar's Opera* was able to make the manager rich, as well as the author in the epigram. A writer in the *Grubstreet Journal,* March 10, 1736, says that "when the first run of the *Beggar's Opera* had assisted him [Rich], he immediately undertook the building of a new Theatre for the greater conveniency of the Town"; thus the popularity of Gay's piece is indirectly made responsible for the building of Covent Garden theatre. Rich is commonly said to have cleared about £4,000, but he must have got considerably more. His only regret, perhaps, was in the loss of Lavinia Fenton at the end of the first season; a loss, however, which did not hinder his later good fortune with the play.

The writer of *The Companion to the Playhouse,* 1764, says that

[21] *Apology,* Chapter VII.
[22] *Irish Stage,* I, 39.
[23] P. 26.

he has "heard it asserted, that the Author's own Advantages from it [the play] were not less than £2,000." There have been conflicting statements about Gay's share of the profits, but it is probably true that common belief, influenced by the catch-phrase of "Gay rich" credited more money to the dramatist than he actually realized. From several sources we hear of definite amounts of money received by the author. Spence says of *The Beggar's Opera* and *Polly* that Gay "got about £400 by the first and £1,100 or £1,200 by the second."[24] Gay's letter to Swift on March 20, 1728, disproves this statement, showing that the author's profits, long before the end of the run, were already between £700 and £800. Gay writes, "I have got by all this success between seven and eight hundred pounds, and Rich, deducting the whole charge of the house, has cleared already near four thousand pounds." If the dramatist is speaking exactly, the profits by March 20, the day after the thirty-sixth performance, were as large as the total amounts sometimes given for the whole season. Gay had benefits on the third, sixth, ninth, and fifteenth nights, with receipts well over £600, and probably others that have not been definitely recorded. Pearce, using R. J. Smith's manuscript dramatic record, assigns Gay another benefit on the eighteenth night, although Rich's cashbook does not distinguish it from the rest. Aside from theatrical profits, it must be remembered, Gay received income from the printed piece, which was disposed of early in the run.

The reasons for the enormous popularity of *The Beggar's Opera,* aside from any merit of the piece, are not hard to imagine, although so many things enter into the success of a play (and especially this one) that it is difficult to analyze and make distinctions. The conditions of the time seem to have been especially favorable to the reception of a new play of this particular composition. The novelty of the ballad opera form, once introduced, caught the public fancy and set London and all England to singing songs once more. The music itself, consisting of good tunes long familiar, was attractive, and became quite as important as the dialogue in bringing returns. Along with this, the refreshing double satire on Italian opera and the government, neither exactly to the taste of all the people, gave evident satisfaction to many, and coupled Gay's name with alluring gossip

[24] *Anecdotes,* p. 214.

for all parts of the town. Thus the two things possibly feared by the Drury Lane management, as well as Rich, seem to have been leading factors in the general applause. The humor of a comedy of low life may have been responsible for more attention. Even the atmosphere of the play, with its supposed tendencies toward immorality, might lure those who could find the scenes wicked enough, or rather dangerous enough, to be intensely interesting. In spite of this, it was most certainly not the coarseness of the piece (as some have wanted to believe) which attracted widespread attention in an age when squeamishness was not a virtue.[25] The material, however, which showed on the stage at least the kinsmen, if not the counterparts, of real and well-known rogues, had its spice for the London of 1728. Society was probably still stirred by the periodical crimes which had increased till the record for them was unprecedented in the history of the city. Not the least factor in the success of the play, by any means, was the good acting, probably under poor theatrical conditions, and with it the sudden favor bestowed upon Lavinia Fenton, the original Polly Peachum, and Walker, who introduced Macheath. These players, together with several more of the principal characters, took the town by storm and helped to create, almost as much as the play itself, a sort of fad about *The Beggar's Opera*. The charming Fenton, with her winning ways and her simple songs, could set the young sparks of London in a rage, while Walker, interpreting the dashing highwayman, could draw the ladies, in a flutter, to the playhouse. Thus it became the stylish thing to go to see the new species of drama at Lincoln's Inn Fields, even at the risk of heresy to old and legitimate theatrical creeds.

It would be too much to suppose, however, that the actors deserved the chief glory or that they *made* the play. It stands to reason that *The Beggar's Opera,* owing to its own quality and the favorable conditions under which it was produced, could easily have made the actors famous. Pearce, the latest biographer of Lavinia Fenton, continually insists upon the idea that the players (above all, the Polly) were practically responsible for the enormous success of the piece.[26] We may agree with Samuel Ireland in saying "it is most probable that notwithstanding its intrinsic merit, and the original character

[25] See Chapter XXI.

[26] *Polly Peachum.*

and humor, with which it abounds, it was in a great measure indebted to the talents of this actress for the success, which it later met with,"[27] and we must admit that in all periods, especially later on, players were often responsible for the prolonged revivals of *The Beggar's Opera*. But it is not necessary to believe that new names on the playbills of other years, any more than Fenton's renown, crowded out fondness for Gay's ballad opera itself. People went to see it because they liked it, not only to see their favorites perform. Pearce seems to think that Fenton assured the success of the piece so distinctly that it was revived, on that account, for a century and a half. He says

> it may be safely asserted that in the hands of any one but the ingenuous damsel of Lincoln's Inn Fields Theatre, Polly Peachum . . . would not have achieved celebrity, and it is quite possible that *The Beggar's Opera* would simply have taken its place in the long list of dramatic productions the names of which have alone been handed down to the present day.[28]

He makes much of Cibber's refusal of the manuscript as important for Gay's lucky hit, for the reason that it threw the play into the hands of Rich, and then Fenton, who stood in a class by herself in the theatrical world. It may be observed, incidentally, that in the review of *The Beggar's Opera* in the *Daily Journal,* Fenton was not mentioned as the all-important factor of carrying the play, and that Pope's letters and comments do not take notice of the manner of presentation. Many things indicate that the success of Walker, perhaps in another way, was about as great as that of Fenton, even if he was not the subject of so much polite gossip and occasional writing. It is plain that the Irish Polly was very successful, and that Miss Warren won new laurels in the second season. It would seem that the early audiences did not consider one certain actress essential to the prosperity of *The Beggar's Opera*. The casts, after a few years, changed constantly, and while some players may have been thought better than others, still any representatives of the favorite piece were likely to be fairly well received, or even considered good.

The original audiences at *The Beggar's Opera* must not be supposed to have been of a kind with the characters represented in the story, thieves in and out of Newgate. There was, of course, the

[27] *Graphic Illustrations,* II, 49-50.

[28] *Polly Peachum,* pp. 43-44.

rougher, lower element to laugh coarsely at certain speeches and songs that found an ear. There may even have been the crowd of butchers—who have been called the regular supporters of Lincoln's Inn Fields—out to see their favorite comedian, Spiller, as Mat of the Mint.[29] But there were present, besides, wits (most of the principal ones approved the piece), statesmen, ladies and gentlemen of fashion, and the most respectable of London's middle class. Such audiences, whether drawn by curiosity to see what the newly recommended play was like, or a mere search for diversion, were no less critical, perhaps, on a different scale, than one to-day. They were no doubt stronger in their likes and dislikes than a modern audience. That *The Beggar's Opera* won their distinct and hearty approval is no small recommendation for the play itself and those presenting it; pieces that were worthless had been hastily damned by this same public. No one can accuse Gay's opera of slipping by inattentive playgoers through some trick of legerdemain. Cibber, himself, went so far as to say that in catching the popular fancy Gay "had more skilfully gratify'd the Publick Taste, than all the brightest Authors that ever writ before him."[30] The envious dramatist, as a theatrical manager, was not blind to the extraordinary success of the piece which he no doubt covertly admired. In view of the fact that Gay's immense hit was scored after some theatrical experience, chance does not appear to have had absolute control.

As the dramatic event of the season, the production of *The Beggar's Opera* was felt in almost every phase of London life. Soon the papers were full of it; the town talked about it; the wits discussed it at the clubs; it was mentioned from the pulpit; the songs were sung in hundreds of homes, no doubt from drawing-room to kitchen; and social functions were never free from the chance to show correct taste in discoursing learnedly about the actors and the scenes they acted out. The book trade was definitely stimulated, both by the numerous editions of the play, genuine or pirated, and by the flood of occasional material it brought from the hack-writers of Grub Street. Aside from Italian opera, regular plays came to be neglected or eclipsed; and no new success was staged that season at Drury Lane. It was something like the irony of fate that the declining Booth's

[29] Pearce, *Polly Peachum*, pp. 120-121.

[30] *Apology*, Chapter VII.

last season was coming to a close while *The Beggar's Opera* was entertaining vast throngs of enthusiastic patrons (his former supporters) over at the other house. Strangely, according to Victor, the Lincoln's Inn Fields company had not long before been "so inferior to the powerful Theatre Royal in *Drury Lane,* they never could see anything like an Audience to any Play without an Interest, till the Success of *Pantomimes,* and the *Beggar's Opera.*"[31] The close competition with Drury Lane was at last broken and the rival owner had the monopoly for that season, while the operatic managers and the proprietors of the other theatre were watching, the former with natural envy, the latter with jealous regret, the crowds streaming to fill the pockets of John Rich.

It is significant that *The Beggar's Opera* is everywhere mentioned in the printed matter of 1728, principally during the original run of sixty-two nights up to June 19. The newspapers, prose pamphlets, miscellaneous verse, plays, and other publications show the excessive popular interest. References to Gay's big success are thick on every hand, in proportion to the extant material to be examined. Such prominence in print is also a chief characteristic of *The Beggar's Opera* during the closely following years, and to a large extent all through the same century. In addition, the many issues of the text in the course of a few months show how busily the publishers were kept working on the new ballad opera.

The *Daily Post* for March 12, 1728, gives an interesting glimpse into the period, and shows, perhaps, how fashionable the piece became:

> Last Tuesday Mr. Hungerford treated in one Day at his House four Speakers of the House of Commons, viz. Mr. Bromley, Sir Thomas Hanmer, Lord Wilmington, and the present Speaker; and afterwards entertain'd them at the Playhouse with the Beggar's Opera.

The following stray examples of early reference indicate how in various ways *The Beggar's Opera* was on the public mind. Mrs. Pendarves, writing to Mrs. Ann Granville on March 14, says, "I desire you will introduce the Beggar's Opera at Glocester; you must sing it everywhere *but at church,* if you have a mind to be *like* the *polite* world."[32] Five days later, addressing the same person, she

[31] *Hist. of Theatres,* II, 75.

[32] Mrs. Delany's *Corresp.,* I, 163.

writes, "I desire you will persue the scheme of performing the Beggar's Opera, but you must defer it till I come to you, for I put in for the part of Mrs. Slamikin!"[33] Whether this is a jest, or an earnest remark regarding amateur theatricals, makes no difference for the point in question. At the end of the year, Mrs. Pendarves is found heading her letter "Cold and raw," no doubt through association with the popular old air as newly introduced in *The Beggar's Opera* the spring before.[34] In a pamphlet called "The Connoisseur. A Satire,"[35] seemingly of the current season, are these lines:

> *Cassius* submits to *Brother you're i' th' wrong,*[36]

and

> Whilst at the Toilette the long Hour to pass,
> The Lady gently hums *Fill ev'ry Glass.*

The fact that Hogarth painted several pictures relating to *The Beggar's Opera,* at least three of them scenes from the play, and made many drawings connected with it, shows in another way the early popularity. Miscellaneous anonymous prints are also numerous, representing a cheaper reflection of the tide of dramatic distinction. Aside from the picture described previously in connection with the first performance, Hogarth designed another with a different subject. Nichols says: "Mr. Walpole has a painting of a scene . . . when Macheath is going to execution. In this also the likenesses of Walker and Miss Fenton . . . are preserved."[37]

The Beggar's Opera even found its way into the decorator's trade. The *Dunciad* note about the matter of fans for the ladies of quality, with favorite songs painted on them, and screens for the houses decorated with scenes from the play, can be proved correct by contemporary documents. Whether Dr. Doran is right in speaking of "fans adorned with subjects from the Opera"[38] (if he meant pictures), or Thomas Dibdin,[39] in saying that songs were put on hand-

[33] Mrs. Delaney's *Corresp.,* I, 165, March 19, 1728.
[34] *Ibid.,* I, 180, Dec. 5, 1728.
[35] London, undated.
[36] See Swift's letter, *post,* Appendix section III, note to p. 196.
[37] *Anecdotes of Hogarth,* p. 19.
[38] *Annals of Stage,* I, 263.
[39] Preface to his ed., London, 1814.

kerchiefs, as well as fire screens and fans, the following newspaper advertisement is evidence enough in one respect. In the *Daily Journal* for May 23, 1728, the day before the fifty-fourth performance, we read:

> To-morrow will be Published, A New and entertaining Fan, consisting of 14 of the most Favourite Songs, taken out of the Beggar's Opera, with the Musick in proper Keys within the Compass of the Flute; curiously engraven on a Copper Plate. Sold for the Author, at Mr. Gay's Head, in Tavistock-street, Covent-Garden.[40]

As to the screens, there is no definite information about their kind. Pearce suggests that they were merely cardboard toys, containing the verses.[41] Older writers, however, whose historical information is usually correct, speak of the screens as articles of household use. The *Dunciad* note says that houses were "furnished with it [*The Beggar's Opera*] in screens." The *Thespian Dictionary* says that the songs were "engraven on song mounts, and screens, and other pieces of furniture were decorated with the same." Samuel Ireland says that "houses were decorated with screens that contained verses or scenes from this celebrated opera," as a part of the evidence that "the very extraordinary merit of the Beggar's Opera, employed the pens and pencils of all ranks in its commendation."[42] Dibdin mentions "songs on fire screens." Lecky tells of "drawing room screens" in connection with the fad and fashion of *The Beggar's Opera*.[43] The following newspaper advertisement may perhaps substantiate Pearce's theory, the very price mentioned (2s. 6d.) seeming to indicate that the article was only a slight ornament. Whether such an article is to be taken as a specimen of a whole class, or a single variant from the common style, it is not easy to determine. The *Daily Journal* for July 2, 1728, ran this notice:

> This Day is Published, The Beggar's Opera Screen, On which is curiously engrav'd on copper Plates, the principal Captives of the All-Conquering *Polly*, plainly describ'd by Hieroglyphicks; and on the Reverse, their Amorous Letters and Declarations to that celebrated Warbler of Ribaldry. The whole illustrated and adorn'd in their proper natural Colours with Mottos suitable to their

[40] Price 1s. 6d.
[41] *Polly Peachum*, p. 127.
[42] *Graphic Illustrations*, I, 60.
[43] *Hist. of England*, I, 587.

Quality. Printed for the Inventor and sold at the Fan Shop next door to White's Chocolate-House, in St. James's-street . . .

The most interesting use of *Beggar's Opera* material, perhaps, is found in the set of playing cards apparently printed during the original run of the play. There are fifty-two cards, each with a different song from Gay's piece. The title of the air and the name of the character who sang it are given, followed by the music (vocal score) and the words, printed as a verse stanza. There are some flute arrangements, too, at the bottom, after the lyrics. The actual playing card symbols are in small squares in the upper left-hand corners.

Of the general literature relating to the play nothing is more characteristic than the fictitious "Memoirs concerning the Life and Manners of Captain Mackheath," published on May 14, 1728, according to the *Monthly Chronicle,* and advertised in the *Craftsman,* May 18, as "this day published." Whether some of its points are serious and satirical, or merely diverting, it is an important document for the history of *The Beggar's Opera.* A writer in the *Craftsman,* May 18, recommends this as entertaining, particularly to those who have "been lately imposed on in so many senseless and insipid Pamphlets, especially with Relation to the *Beggar's Opera.*"

The Stage Medley, undated, is another interesting document that may safely be assigned to the first season. It is a broadside print which was no doubt published when the popularity of *The Beggar's Opera* was at its height. Its sub-title reads, "Representing the Polite Tast of the Town & the matchless merits of *Poet G——, Polly Peachum* & *Captn. Macheath.*" There are pictures indicating and burlesquing the success of the play, and portraits, among others, of Polly and Macheath. Several skits to Gay's tunes are included. One passage of verse will denote the average content:

> Had Democritus liv'd but to See
> How madly the people run after
> Polly Peachum and Captain Macheath,
> He'd have burst at their folly with laughter.

Another broadside apparently published about this time was *The Ladies' Opera.* This is really a letter in verse, in opera form, about the affairs of the town; "recitativos" and songs to Gay's tunes are

made to alternate. "Recitativo 4" tells how the new entertainment has crippled the ladies' favorite diversion:

> And now, dear *Puss,* what shall I say
> About the *Beggar's Opera?*
> Nay, it has rivall'd dear *Quadrill,*
> Nor do they think that Night spent ill
> If they can chorus *Polly Peachum.*
> There's fifty Tunes that I can teach 'em.
> There's *pretty Poll!* and *Gossip Joan!*
> Now for an air to fit that Tone.

Two pieces, which I have been unable to trace, were advertised as follows: (*Daily Journal,* May 7, 1728) "This Day is Published, A Sketch of the Beggar's Opera. Being a Lively Representation of that so-much Admir'd Performance, with Suitable Instruments and Decorations. . . . Sold by E. Sympson . . . Bridges Street, Covent Garden," price, one shilling; (*Monthly Chronicle,* June, 1728) "Polly Peachum on fire: The Beggar's Opera blown up, and Captain Mackheath entangled in his Bazzle-strings. Sold at the Print-shops," price sixpence. The latter was apparently only a print.

The popularity of *The Beggar's Opera,* from its first performance, is openly indicated in "A Ballad, Call'd, A Dissertation on the Beggar's Opera," a waggish poem printed at the end of *The Fool's Opera,* April, 1731. The verses may have appeared during the first season and were included here only for good measure; but even if they should belong to 1731 they refer directly to the sensation and the influence of the original run. Of the eight stanzas, the last six are quoted below:

> *Polly* she grew extensive fair;
> She put in to be a Player
> In that same famous Play,
> Which ran Night and Day,
> Call'd the *Beggar's Opera.*
> O brave *Gay!*

> *Shakespear* divine was cut to the Soul;
> *Addison* and *Dryden* ran their Heads in a hole;
> Z——ds, quo' Wycherly;
> Steel swore bitterly,
> He'd kill him, which is He?
> So said *Lee.*

Up started *Gay* then, I'll tell you what, quo' He,
My new turn'd Still diverts the Quality;
I shall be a Fav'rite still,
Tho' to wit a bitter Pill;
That's *Novimus esse Nil*,[44]
Beyon my Skill.

Then all the Mob from the City and Court
Ran to see this Hodge-podge Sport:
This same famous Play,
Which ran Night and Day,
Call'd the *Beggar's Opera.*
O brave *Gay!*

Well, good Folks, since for *Wit* you're not,
That nothing but by Nonsense a Penny's to be got;
Pray subscribe before you go,
(For my *Wit* runs very low,)
For a Musick-booth or Puppet-show;
Come let's go.

Then all the Mob from the City and Court,
Came to see this ingenious Sport:
This same famous Strain,
Which brought *Rich* his Gain,
And maul'd *Drury-Lane,*
Shine or Rain.

[44] A part of Gay's motto, on the original title-page.

CHAPTER II

THE ORIGINAL POLLY AND MACHEATH

THE actors themselves, of course, did not escape from the publicity which *The Beggar's Opera* had brought upon them, especially Lavinia Fenton and Thomas Walker, representing Polly Peachum and Macheath. These two were naturally the stars, but the whole company seems to have carried away honors, even the smallest parts being applauded. Anything that came in touch with the favorite play was changed as if by magic, and made more important than it really was. Eighteenth-century writing has much to say about even the minor players and the minor persons of the piece. Rich, with the help of Gay, seems to have got together a really good cast, which played as a unit without any friction or jealousy of Polly or Macheath. Some members of the company were known before *The Beggar's Opera,* and had acted in prominent plays. Others, though obscure, were capable of being drawn into fame when the time came for them to create a part and for the part to make them.

The cast of the original season should be recorded here in full, in the order of mention in the first edition:

Peachum,	*Hippisley.*
Lockit,	*Hall.*
Macheath,	*Walker.*
Filch,	*Clark.*
Jemmy Twitcher,	*H. Bullock.*
Crookfinger'd Jack,	*Houghton.*
Wat Dreary,	*Smith.*
Robin of Bagshot,	*Lacy.*
Nimming Ned,	*Pit.*
Harry Padington,	*Eaton.*
Mat of the Mint,	*Spiller.*
Ben Budge,	*Morgan.*

Beggar,	*Chapman.*
Player,	*Milward.*
Mrs. Peachum,	*Mrs. Martin.*
Polly Peachum,	*Miss Fenton.*
Lucy Lockit,	*Mrs. Egleton.*
Diana Trapes,	*Mrs. Martin.*
Mrs. Coaxer,	*Mrs. Holiday.*
Dolly Trull,	*Mrs. Lacy.*
Mrs. Vixen,	*Mrs. Rice.*
Betty Doxy,	*Mrs. Rogers.*
Jenny Diver,	*Mrs. Clarke.*
Mrs. Slammekin,	*Mrs. Morgan.*
Suky Tawdry,	*Mrs. Palin.*
Molly Brazen,	*Mrs. Sallee.*

Rich seems to have secured Lavinia Fenton principally for the part of Cherry in *The Beaux' Stratagem*. This part and several more she continued to play for fifteen shillings a week till the beginning of 1728. Then looking around for a proper Polly, the manager fixed upon a member of his own company and raised her money to thirty shillings. Rich was no doubt trying an experiment when he decided on Fenton for Polly, and was lucky in the outcome. The rise in salary, however, does not necessarily indicate that he intuitively foresaw in her the winner of hearts by *The Beggar's Opera*. It is barely possible that he was afraid she might be led to accept an offer elsewhere when he needed her most; but the real reason, if we are to believe Cooke's figures, was that her engagement for Polly, a singing part, carried with it the larger, if not the large, salary.

In achieving sudden fame, the Polly Peachum was far ahead of the rest. Lavinia Fenton, as much as Gay's heroine, became the toast of the town, though her real name was submerged and the public was satisfied with Polly. Mrs. Charles Mathews writes that "so painfully was she importuned and pursued by her numerous lovers, that it was deemed expedient that some confidential friends should guard her nightly home, to prevent her being hurt by the crowd or run away with."[1] Cooke says that Fenton was the best theatrical singer of her

[1] *Memoirs of Charles Mathews.* Busby (*Concert Room Anecdotes*) has the same story.

time, and that she had been given a good musical education by her stepfather. Thus at the early age of twenty she was ready to show her talents in *The Beggar's Opera,* in which she was to be at her best. Mrs. Mathews says, "No actress or singer (of the time) could have been more popular at any period of the drama." Added to her vocal powers were her physical grace and her winsome personality, if we may believe contemporary reports. Samuel Ireland tells of the "peculiar sweetness in her eyes." Such seductive charms drew Charles Powlett, Duke of Bolton, forty-three years old, to Lincoln's Inn Fields night after night. He sat in a stage box at the first performance; perhaps he had admired Lavinia before that time. The attraction of the singing Polly, however, seems to have captivated him so completely that he was impelled to take the actress off the stage at the close of the season to make her his mistress and later his wife. He is said to have been first enamored by her manner of singing "Oh, ponder well." Miss Fenton's career as an actress was consequently a very short one, from 1726 to 1728, and as Polly only from January 29 to June 19, the last performance of the season, when she left the stage forever.

The *Dunciad* note is proved correct in its statement about Fenton, that "her pictures were engraved and sold in great numbers, her *life* written; books of letters and verses to her publish'd; and pamphlets made even of her *sayings* and *jests*." Evidences of all these are extant. "The Life of *Lavinia Beswick,* alias *Fenton,* alias *Polly Peachum,*" was published on May 24, 1728, at one shilling, according to the *Monthly Chronicle.* Some of the information is possibly as fictitious as that in the *Memoirs of Captain Mackheath,* or the common lives of Jack Sheppard and other notorious persons, containing a bare thread of fact and much imagination. The opening sentence tells of "The Town being amused with the Performances of *Polly Peachum,* who has exerted herself in the *Beggar's Opera* far above any of her Cotemporaries at the Theatre." In another place we hear how the town is "running to the Beggar's Opera." There is also a reference to the picture of the actress in mezzotinto. Polly is made to say, "we in this have spoke the Town on the weak-side of the Head, and made it so giddy, I fear in a little Time it will fall, and dash the *Brains* out of the *Beggar's Opera.*" To complete the list of

triumphs, there is an instance of a child's being named after Polly Peachum. This *Life* is too early to include the affair with the Duke of Bolton, but there is mention of other lovers, the first being a noble knight of Bath, who became infatuated with the charms of Polly.

The raving over Polly expressed itself also in pictures of every kind,—in prints, on fans, and in the work of Hogarth. Mrs. Charles Mathews says, "Not a printshop or fan-shop but exhibited her handsome figure in her Polly's costume, which possessed all the characteristic simplicity of the modern Quakeress, without one meretricious ornament."[2] Some of the portraits were accompanied by verses in her praise. It was not a novelty for prints of players to be sold; the newspapers contain notices of others of this kind. The point here is that Polly, though she did not by any means start a fashion, seems to have exceeded all records, if we may judge by contemporary comments, which imply the unusual practice in her case. Hogarth took advantage of the occasion to paint his portrait of Lavinia Fenton as Polly Peachum, one of his earliest works in oil.[3] Samuel Ireland thought it was painted when *The Beggar's Opera* "first attained its popularity on the English stage."[4] Whether or not it is a true likeness—the subject does seem a trifle stout for the so-called graceful Polly—it reflects the general applause of 1728.

As to the sayings and jests, Polly was popular enough to carry another of these rather common collections of the day. The pamphlet was advertised in the *Monthly Chronicle* for April, 1728. Its title reads: "Polly Peachum's Jests: In which are comprised most of the Witty Apothegms, diverting Tales, and smart Repartees that have been used for many Years last past, either at St. *James,* or St. *Giles's:* Suited alike to the Capacities of the Peer, and the Porter." The pamphlet has no great wit or originality, and no bearing on Polly or *The Beggar's Opera* with the exception of one anecdote. The jests, as the "Epistle Dedicatory to Miss Peachum" says, were collected as much for Polly's pleasure as anything else. Over a hundred jests or anecdotes are printed. The whole pamphlet, like others of this class, seems to be a mere excuse for one more piece of topical literature.

[2] This description is based on Macklin's comment on her dress, recorded by Cooke (*Memoirs,* p. 48).

[3] National Gallery, London, No. 1161. See *post,* opposite p. 132.

[4] *Graphic Illustrations,* II, 49.

If Samuel Ireland meant, indirectly, this pamphlet when he said that it "even became fashionable to repeat her [Fenton's] colloquial phrases," he was giving her credit for something for which she was not responsible.

The public notice of the heroine did not end here. The letters and verses to Polly, coming so thickly together during her short career in *The Beggar's Opera,* suggest that, regardless of any merit whatever, Fenton had won widespread popularity, and that the rage about her was a reality. It is said that street ballads celebrated her name, and we find the newspapers furnishing many verses of their own. They are all intended for Lavinia instead of Polly, but outside the part the actress would have received no attention at all. It was Gay's creation which was responsible for these occasional writings. In some cases it is hard to judge whether the pieces are sincere or meant to be humorously satirical.

Mist's Weekly Journal, March 2, 1728, printed the following verses "On Miss Polly Peachum in the Beggar's Opera":

> While Polly charms the present Age,
> And Venus' Train the Fair surrounds,
> Autumnal O--f--ld broils with Rage,
> And rugged P-rt-r grimly frowns.
>
> To the soft Flute B---th trips in vain,
> Nor longer draws th' applauding Throng:
> E'en pretty Y--ng--er's comic Strain,
> Yields, with the rest, to Polly's Song.[5]

The *Craftsman* for March 9, 1728, contained a poem *"To Miss* Polly Peachum. A Town Pastoral. Written in Imitation of the Fourth Eclogue of *Virgil.* By *J. W.* of *Cheapside, Linnen-Draper."* This has such phrases as "in dear Polly all the Muses shine." One couplet runs,

> Thy Charms transport me, while I bless thy Voice,
> And in the general, loud Applause rejoice.

Other lines are:

> *Courtiers* and *Peers* contend in praising Thee,

and

[5] Oldfield; Porter; Booth; Younger.

Ev'n thy *own Sex* thy shining Charms extol,
And, young or old, acknowledge *pretty Poll;*
While Envy *is itself in Wonder lost,*
And Factions *strive who shall applaud Thee most.*

There are slight references to Macheath, Lucy, and others.

On March 22 "A New Ballad, Inscrib'd to Polly Peachum. To the Tune of Pretty Parrot say" was published in folio. A Dublin edition was soon copied from it. The ballad was reprinted by Caleb D'Anvers, during May, in the *Twickenham Hotch-Potch,* as if it had been written by him. The poem, which contains fourteen stanzas of eleven lines each, is coarse in its hints at Gay as Fenton's keeper and its list of other famous lovers of Polly Peachum. The names are all in blank. The point seems to be the condition of the actress before fame was acquired through Gay's assistance in contrast to her popularity now as a mistress. "An Answer to a New Ballad" soon followed, in pamphlet form. It was reprinted by D'Anvers in the *Hotch-Potch* with the other ballad. Both may have been written by him at different times, and in different moods, or both or either may have been the work of another hand. The answer, which is to the same air, defends Fenton against her former attack. A few of the lines (the first of two different stanzas) will suggest the content:

Poll performs her Parts
With such Grace and Arts,
That each Night she conquers Hearts,
  Both in Pit and Boxes.

Since *Poll* has gain'd Applause,
All vindicate her Cause,
And prodigious Crowds she draws,
All conspire to Clap her;
  The House rings,
  When she Sings.

"A Letter to Polly. To one of Her own Tunes" appeared soon after; the *Monthly Chronicle* says on April 2, 1728. The tune is "O Jenny, O Jenny, where hast thou been?" The argument here concerns Polly's method of bewitching the town, and her questionable charms for certain men.

On April 13, in the *Craftsman,* appeared "Polly Peachum: A New Ballad. To the Tune of, Of all the Girls that are so smart." Of the six stanzas the following lines are most significant:

I

Of all the Belles that tread the Stage,
  There's none like pretty *Polly,*
And all the Musick of the Age,
  Except her Voice, is Folly;
The waining Nymphs of *Drury-Lane*
  I now can bear no longer;
And when she's present, I disdain
  My *quondam* favourite Y——ger.[6]

II

Compar'd with her, how flat appears
  Cuzzoni or *Faustina?*
And when she sings, I shut my Ears
  To warbling *Senesino.*

III

Great Dames there are, who break their Vows
  As oft as Madam *Peachum,*
And *greater Robbers* than her Spouse,
  Though *Tyburn* cannot reach 'em.[7]
What though *Macheath* too is as bad
  As Father or as Mother,
And, blest with *Polly,* is so mad
  To ramble to another?

V

Some Prudes indeed, with envious Spight,
  Would blast her Reputation,
And tell us that to *Ribands* bright
  She yields, upon Occasion.

VI

But these are all invented Lies,
  And vile *outlandish* Scandal,
Which from *Italian* Clubs arise,
  And Partizans of *Handel.*[8]
Then let us toast the blooming Lass,
  Whose Charms have thus ensnared me;
I'd drink it in a brimming Glass,
  Though Parson **H——g* heard me.

* *The Author of a late famous Sermon against the* Beggar's Opera. (Dr. Thomas Herring. See Chapter XXI.)

[6] Younger.
[7] See Chapter XVII.
[8] See Chapter XIII.

In the issue of the *Craftsman* for April 13, the following notice was run, apparently as a novel puff of the enterprising publisher, who realized the advantage of such common public gossip about the admirers of Fenton:

> Whereas P—ll—y P—ch—m hath of late received innumerable Letters of Love and Gallantry from all Quarters of the Town, this is to give Notice, that the Week after Easter, she designs to have them printed by Subscription, with the Names of the Authors, in two neat Pocket Volumes. The Price to Subscribers is Two Guineas.

Then follows an explanation how gentlemen may have their amours kept secret by paying more, in accordance with their rank. "Attendance is given, twice a Week, behind the Scenes, where Subscriptions are taken in and Hush-money receiv'd."

A notice like this naturally sounds spurious, but it is perhaps a forerunner of the real pamphlet, now extant, "Letters in Prose and Verse, To the Celebrated Polly Peachum: From the most Eminent of her Admirers and Rivals." Such a piece was advertised in the *Monthly Chronicle* for July, 1728, but that was probably the second edition.[9] The advertisement in the volume says, "These Letters were dropped as the famous Polly Peachum took Coach to meet His ———."[10] On p. 5 is a song to the tune of "Sally in our alley." On p. 8 is a poem, "To the Fair Polly." One line runs, "Jealous I heard the Public praise thy Name." On p. 9, to the tune of "If Loves a sweet Passion," is a song beginning, "*If* Polly *is generous she'll pity my Flame.*" On p. 11 is a poem called "An Old Woman Cloath'd in Rags." On p. 13 is a poem, "*A Challenge from* C——oni *and* F——na,[11] *to* Polly Peachum." On p. 15 is a letter "*From* an old *affected* Physician *and* Antiquary," to Madam Polly. He says, "Some of my Patients the other Night drew me to your *Opera,* where I received a most violent Rheum by leaving off one of my Night-Caps, in order to hear better." On p. 17 is a piece which takes for once the opposite side: "To the most Unharmonious Polly." The writer says, "Let whining Slaves thy Tinsell Charms pursue," and "Give me Miss Warren with obliging Eyes." On p. 18, in a letter "From an honest

[9] The copy in the B.M. is a second ed., 1728. The first ed. (copy of Mr. E. L. Gay) is quoted here.

[10] The Duke of Bolton?

[11] Cuzzoni and Faustina.

Half-Pay Officer," we read: "I think the *Poet* and Mr. *Rich* are excellent in our Art, for they have robbed the whole Town before us, and left us very little to do." On p. 20 is "A Challenge from the Valiant and Renowned Mr. F——g,"[12] to the tune of "Britons, Strike home." On p. 21 is another uncomplimentary song to the tune of "The Lass of Peatie's Mill," beginning,

Oh Polly, lovely Lass,
Whose Voice so rude, and shrill.

The last piece, purporting to be from Macheath, to the tune of "Pretty Parrot say," runs, in part:

Pretty Polly, when
These dull Scenes are oe'r,
And we are our selves again,
  Meet me at the Door . . .

See this crowded Stage,
To admire our Song.
'Tis a pretty polish'd Age:
  Nonsense bless it long!

In the *Daily Journal* for Friday, April 19, is found "Advice to Polly." Of the thirteen stanzas, these most concern us:

I

When first wild *Humour* takes a Freak,
  To mad the obsequious Town,
A Crowd of Fops contend to lead
  The Frantick Folly on.

II

This, Polly, thy Experience learns,
  From the adoring Throng,
Who doat on thy deluding Form,
  And idolize thy Tongue.

III

While Wilks and Oldfield vainly strive
  To draw an Audience round,
And Warren tunes her warbling Voice,
  To all the Charms of Sound.

[12] Fagg.

IV

Sure, Polly, *Venus* bless'd thy Birth,
With strange bewitching Rays,
And bid thee live, to cheat the World
Of its fantastick Praise.

VII

But if the *Learned World* we ask,
What 'tis delights the Throng?
They answer, *Fashion* only leads
The Herd of *Fools* along.

XII

O Polly! by her End,[13] be warn'd,
Nor too profusely please,
Lest Fires inbred should burn thee too,
And set Mankind at Ease.

Then followed what, if genuine, was the appeal of Lavinia Fenton herself for a share in the public patronage of the miscellaneous printed matter pertaining to *The Beggar's Opera.* The notice (probably only the trick of the advertiser, for the material hardly suggests the hand of Fenton) appeared in the *Daily Journal* for Wednesday, May 1:

Whereas my Name has been the Subject of several Songs and Pamphlets lately publish'd, This is to inform the Town, That I never (before now) was privy or consenting to any one thing made Publick; but being willing to entertain the Town with something diverting, I have this Day, with the Joint Interest of another Person who performs in the Beggar's Opera, publish'd a Pamphlet, by the Title of Polly Peachum's Opera: Which contains a Medley of New Songs, never before publish'd, adapted to the several Tunes I sing in the Beggar's Opera: With the Song inserted in the Country Journal, or Craftsman, of Saturday, April 13, 1728.[14] To which is annex'd, A New Ballad, inscrib'd to my Father, my beloved Captain Macheath, and the Illustrious Gang of Highway-Robbers. To the Tune of Green Sleves, alias, Upon Tyburn Tree. Which is from your Humble Servant, Polly Peachum.

Such a work may have been published around May 1; but all the pieces mentioned appear in the pamphlet, published on May 13, according to the *Monthly Chronicle,* called "The *Twickenham* Hotch-Potch, for the Use of the Rev. Dr. Swift, Alexander Pope, Esq.; and Company. Being a Sequel to the Beggar's Opera, &c . . . Written by Caleb D'Anvers."

[13] Joan of Arc's.

[14] See *ante,* p. 27.

There are eight divisions to this pamphlet listed on the title-page, but some of them are not plain indexes to the real contents, as for instance No. vi, "A Poetical Catalogue of *Polly Peachum's* Gallants." The compiler bluntly describes the taste of the town: "And those nice Persons, whose squeamish Palates refused *Quails* and *Partridges,* have pined ever since in such a Dearth, that they greedily feed upon *Bull-Beef,* alias, the *Beggar's Opera.*" Among the verses printed, the following concerning Polly and the popularity of the opera are typical. There is an "Epigram, To Miss *Beswick,* alias *Fenton,* alias *Polly Peachum.*" The idea is expressed in the opening line, "Be not vain of your fancy'd Success I desire you." Another piece is "Polly Peachum's Opera: or a Medley of New Songs. Published with Her Approbation."[15] Under that head come several poems of various kinds. "*The Old* Sportsman: Or, *the antiquated* Baronet, *behind the* Scenes" is apparently reprinted from the verses in the *Daily Journal* for April 27. These tell how Polly has won the nobleman who never before was moved.[16] "A New Ballad. By Caleb D'Anvers. To the Tune of, *Sally in our Alley*" is the same as the one in the *Craftsman* for April 13. There is another "New Ballad. Inscribed to Mr. Peachum, and Captain Macheath, &c. To the Tune of, *Green Sleeves,* alias *Upon* Tyburn *Tree.*" Then there are fourteen "Songs, set to the Tunes Polly Peachum Sings in the *Beggar's Opera.*" The airs used are "Now ponder well," "Cease your Funning," "Le Printemps," etc., "Good-morrow, Gossip Joan," "Gin thou wert," etc., "Thomas, I cannot," "I am a poor Shepherd undone," "Grim King of the Ghosts," "O the Broom," "All in the Downs," "What shall I do to show," etc., "Would Fate to me Belinda give," "Pretty Parrot say" (two stanzas being the same as those in the answer to the *Ballad to Polly*), and the "Irish Howl." In several of these songs there are hits at Gay, as Fenton's lover.

The 1728 edition of Bullock's *A Woman's Revenge,* containing the so-called *Key to the Beggar's Opera,*[17] has a piece that belongs about this time, a sketch in prose and verse, "To Pretty Miss Polly Peachum." It begins thus:

[15] This is an opera only in name, like *The Ladies' Opera.*

[16] Sir Robert Fagg.

[17] See *post,* p. 181.

Pretty *Polly* say,
What makes *Johnny Gay,*
To call, to call his *Newgate*-Scenes
The *Beggar's Opera?*

The writer says his "only desire is to Forewarn and Admonish thee in *Mournful-guise* of the great Danger we are in, from this Damn'd *Thieves* Opera we are so merry about."

The *Daily Journal* for May 1 also advertised, as just published, "Six Ballads on the Humours of the Town," by Mr. Carey, including, as the first, "On Madam Polly, and the Beggar's Opera." This must have been the "A Song on *Polly Peachum.* To the Tune of, *Sally in our Alley,*" which was later printed in the third edition of 1728,[18] and used in many other copies. The piece contains some sly satire, along with some good-humored praise:

Of all the Toasts that *Britain* boasts,
The Jim, the Gent, and Jolly,
The Brown, the Fair, the Debonair;
There's none cry'd up like *Polly.*
She has charm'd the Town, and quite cut down
The *Opera* of *Rolli:*
Go where you will, the Subject still
Is pretty, pretty *Polly.*

There's Madam *Fustina, Catso,*
And eke Madam *Cuzzoni;*
Likewise Mynheer *Senisino,*
Are *tuti abandoni:*
Ha, ha, ha, ha, *do re me fa,*
Are all but Farce and Folly;
We're ravish'd all with toll, toll, toll,
And pretty, pretty *Polly.*[19]

The Sons of Bays, in Lyrick Lays,
Sound forth her Fame in Print . . . o;
And as we pass in Frame and Glass,
We see her Mezzo-tinto.
In *Ivy-lane* and City strain
Is now no more on *Doly;*
And all the Brights at *Man's* and *White's,*
Of nothing prat but *Polly.*

[18] Pp. 73-74.
[19] See Chapter XIII.

Oh *Johnny Gay!* thy lucky Play
Has made the Criticks grin . . . a;
They cry, *'Tis flat,* 'tis this and that:
But let them laugh that win . . . a.
I swear *Parbleu,* 'tis naif and new,
Ill Nature shews but Folly;
Thou 'as lent a Stich to Fate of *Rich,*
And set up Madam *Polly.*

Where *Plenepo's* and shining Beaus
Meet, to compose all *Europe,*
To *Soisson* our *Polly's* gone,
New Lovers to allure up.
O lovely *Maid!* lend all thy Aid,
That *French* and *Germans* jolly,
And *Spaniards* sowr, may own the Power
Of *Britain's* pretty *Polly.*

But Tuneful Fair, beware, beware,
Nor toy with *Fleece* or *Garter;*
Fine Cloaths may hide a soul Inside,
And you may catch a *Tartar.*
If powder'd Fop blow up your Shop,
'Twill make you melancholly,
Then left forlorn, the Beaus will scorn;
Alas! alas! poor *Polly.*

This piece was reprinted, in five stanzas, in Carey's *Poems on Several Occasions,* 1729, with some other verses touching upon *The Beggar's Opera,* possibly written during the original run. Even though such poems may belong later than the first season, they indicate the popularity of the play in 1729. In the "Prologue Address'd to the Ladies (Intended to be spoken by Little Miss Robinson at her Benefit)" are these lines:

O! that I could but have my Will, I'd teach 'um
To make such Splutter about Polly Peachum.
Well . . . Let 'em take their *Polly,* and their Fancy,
So I . . . dear Ladies! could but be your Nancy.

In another piece, called "The Beau Monde, Or the Pleasures of St. James's. A Ballad," to the tune of "London is a fine town," Carey writes:

Oh! there's Miss Polly Peachum Lugs
Our Nobles by the Ears,
'Till Ponder Well by far Exceeds
The Musick of the Spheres.

When lo! to show the Wisdom Great
Of London's famous Town,
We set her up above her self,
And then we take her down.

In Watts' *Musical Miscellany,* 1729, are two songs, set by Mr. Monroe, which may have been written the year before. One is called "A Song in Praise of Polly,"[20] running, in part:

While the Town agrees that *Polly*
Best diverts our Melancholy,
Let us toast the sprightly Lass.
Heedless of the Time and Treasure,
Spent on her who gives such Pleasure;
Drink, and put about the Glass.

Polly's Charms are so extensive,
That the Chearful, Grave, and Pensive,
Equally their Pow'r, equally their Pow'r obey.
. . . . . .
Pretty *Polly's* always Gay.[21]

The other piece, "The Prudential Lover," is apparently an answer to the preceding.[22]

Whilst the Town's brimful of Folly,
And runs gadding after *Polly,*
Let us take a chearful Glass.
Tell me, *Damon,* where's the Pleasure
Of bestowing Time and Treasure,
For to make ones self an Ass?

I'm for Joys are less Expensive,
Where the Pleasure's more extensive,
And from dull Attention free;
Where my *Celia,* o'er a Bottle,
Can, when tir'd with am'rous Prattle,
Sing old Songs as well as She.

[20] Vol. VI.
[21] Probably a play on the dramatist's name.
[22] Vol. II.

All of the documents just treated, while bearing on *The Beggar's Opera* as a whole, were directed at the special part of Polly, and apparently at Lavinia Fenton, as its successful exponent. Thomas Walker, though distinctly stamping the idea of Macheath, a hero highwayman, on the public mind, through his fine acting, full of dash and fire, received no such attention. The ballads were almost all for Polly, possibly because they were written by men, and the women, though admiring to a frenzy, doted in unprinted enthusiasm. The portrait of Walker, however, was exhibited in the printshops, and appeared on fans and screens with that of Polly Peachum. Cooke mentions a mezzotinto print of him as Macheath which Davies said was a very striking resemblance. Samuel Ireland prints a picture of a theatre ticket designed by Hogarth for Walker's benefit at Covent Garden, several years later, showing the prison scene of *The Beggar's Opera* in a different version.[23] Whether he received great notice in the public writings or not, Walker plainly became the hero of the young fellows of the town. According to Wheatley, "During the run of the Beggar's Opera and for many years after, Walker was more in requisition with the public than the highest performers on the stage."[24] It was an honor to have been with him at a tavern, and a privilege to know him personally.

Chance had given Walker, instead of Quin, the part of Macheath. The latter seems to have been picked for the character. The friend of Gay, and an actor of recognized merit at Lincoln's Inn Fields, he may have deserved the compliment. The account of Quin's withdrawal from the opera cast, and the substitution of Walker, is variously told. Some say that Quin, knowing his inability to sing, or to act the hero highwayman, a part for which he cared little, begged Gay to give the place to Walker, whom he had heard humming one of the airs at a rehearsal. Others say that Rich or Gay discovered Walker humming the airs, and at once seized upon him as a better man for the part than Quin. Cooke asserts that Quin, though not enthusiastic about Macheath, was led to drudge through two rehearsals, merely on account of the renown of Gay and the critics supporting him, and that after the second Walker was discovered behind the scenes humming some of the music

[23] *Graphic Illustrations,* Vol. I, opp. p. 58.
[24] *Hogarth's London,* p. 313.

in a tone and liveliness of manner which attracted all their notice. Quin laid hold of this circumstance to get rid of the part, and exclaimed, "Aye, there's a man who is much more qualified to do you justice than I am." Walker was called upon to make the experiment; and Gay, who instantly saw the difference, accepted him as the hero of the piece.[25]

That would explain why it was said of Walker that "Booth found him a *hero,* and Gay dubbed him a *highwayman.*"[26] If Rich was sorry to see Quin give up the part, his regret did not have to last long, for Walker, though no great singer, was able by his brilliant acting to carry away high honors as Macheath, whereas Quin might have fallen flat in a rôle outside his field. Walker, already a successful player, if not famous, thanks to *The Beggar's Opera* was able to change his minor achievements into one master stroke. Samuel Ireland remarks that "Walker is said to have thrown an easy and dissolute air into the character, to which all his successors have been strangers."[27] There may have been, later, better singing Macheaths, but few of the performers who followed him have been compared with him for acting.

[25] Cooke's *Memoirs of Macklin,* pp. 27-28.
[26] *Ibid.,* p. 30.
[27] *Graphic Illustrations,* I, 61.

CHAPTER III

THE FIRST SEASON OUTSIDE OF LONDON

MANY plays find temporary success and are soon forgotten. *The Beggar's Opera,* however, not only continued its popularity in London after the original run, but was even played outside of London during the first season. The piece had been put on in midwinter; otherwise the record of sixty-two nights would no doubt have been greatly increased. In the meantime, when London audiences were sounding the praises of Polly Peachum, the play had taken the road.

Mist's Weekly Journal, as early as May 4, said:

> The Beggar's Opera has already strollen into the Country; it has been seen at Dover to great advantage, and it is expected at Norwich, and, it's thought, will make a general Progress thro' the Kingdom this Summer.

When we consider that May 4 was the date of only the forty-eighth performance, and that it was unusual in those days for a new play to wander out of London, we see plainly the traces of a big sensation in the city. Aside from this, we must remember that here was a singing play, and that actors who had never before dabbled in opera were soon making music all over Great Britain. If we are to believe the *Dunciad* note, *The Beggar's Opera* "spread into all the great towns of England, was play'd in many places to the thirtieth, and fortieth time, at Bath and Bristol fifty, &c." Gay wrote to Swift from Bath, on May 16, 1728: "The Beggar's Opera is acted here; but our Polly hath got no fame, but the actors have got money." How much of all this success outside of London was accomplished during the first season, it is hard to determine from the statement given in the *Dunciad* note. Anyhow, the fact that almost every section of the United Kingdom saw *The Beggar's Opera* during 1728 would be wonderful enough. With Wales, Scotland, and Ireland added to the list of triumphs, and far-off Minorca, then a British possession, knowing of the loves of Captain Macheath, Gay could be said to have

achieved distinct success with the production which had been refused at Drury Lane.

The following account of early activities outside of London is contained in *Brice's Weekly Journal,* July 28, 1728:

> We hear from Bath, that Mr. Gay, Author of the celebrated "Beggar's Opera," has been there these two months drinking the waters for his Health, During which Time he has taken more than ordinary Pains with the Comedians of that City, in instructing them in the Performance of his said Opera, which has so good an Effect that they have not only gain'd a great deal of Money by it, but universal Applause, insomuch that they play'd it all Last Season at Bath, and still continue playing it in Bristol at their Great Booth in Bridewell Lane near the corner of St. James's Churchyard; and have been sent for by the Quality to perform it at their Houses, and to the Long Room near the Hot-well several Times. They intend to continue playing the same, during the Time of St. James's Fair every Evening, having the famous Mr. Hippisley The Original Performer of Peachum in Lincoln's Inn Fields added to their company.

Cooke, writing at the end of the century, says, "The reception this celebrated Opera met with in Ireland, Scotland, and Wales, is too well known to need recital."[1] Perhaps the most brilliant success outside of London was manifested in Ireland, where Dublin was soon ringing with applause, and that during the very first season of the play at Lincoln's Inn Fields. Jackson says, "When the Beggar's Opera was first acted in Dublin, it was so much applauded and admired, that all ranks of people flocked to see it."[2] The *Dunciad* note states that the piece made its progress into Ireland "where it was performed twenty-four days together," without specifying the time. We learn from Thomas Wilkes, however, that "in the year 1727 [1727/8] the Beggar's Opera had a run of twenty-four nights" in Ireland.[3] According to *Mist's Weekly Journal,* the opera had already been "twice acted in Dublin with Crowding and Applause" before March 30.[4] The same paper, for July 6, 1728, under notes on Dublin, says, "The Beggar's Opera has run three and twenty nights, and perhaps *their* Polly Peachum may go to the Congress as well as *ours*."

Swift's letters to Gay and Pope during the first season give direct

[1] *Memoirs of Macklin,* pp. 60-61.
[2] *Scottish Stage,* p. 335, note.
[3] *General View of Stage,* p. 311.
[4] Issue of March 30.

evidence for the Irish end of the early history. On February 26, 1728, Swift wrote to Gay:

> I bought your opera to-day for sixpence, so small printed that it will spoil my eyes. I ordered you to send me your edition, but now you may keep it till you get an opportunity.

In another letter to Gay, on March 28, Swift said:

> We have your opera for sixpence, and we are as full of it *pro modulo nostro* as London can be; continually acting, and house crammed, and the Lord Lieutenant several times there laughing his heart out. I wish you had sent me a copy, as I desired, to oblige an honest bookseller. It would have done Motte no hurt, for no English copy has been sold, but the Dublin one has run prodigiously. . . . I am heartily glad your opera has mended your purse, though perhaps it may spoil your court. I think that rich rogue, Rich, should in conscience make you a present of two or three hundred guineas.

In a note to this letter Swift's editor quotes a paragraph from the *Dublin Intelligence* of March 23, 1728:

> The New Opera which is again to be Play'd to Night was on Thursday more Crowded with Spectators than ever, and really it is now so far the Topick of General Conversation here that they who have not seen it are hardly thought worth Speaking to by their Acquaintance, and are only Admitted into Discourse on their promise of going to see it the first Opportunity, which is so advantageous to our Comedians that we are told Boxes &c. are bespoke for 16 or 18 Nights to come.

Swift wrote to Pope on May 10, 1728:

> Mr. Gay's opera has been acted here twenty times, and my Lord Lieutenant tells me it is very well performed; he has seen it often, and approves it much.

From various sources we hear of the reception of the play in Ireland. O'Keeffe asserts, "On the first and great successful run of Gay's 'Beggar's Opera,' in London, his friend Swift with his powerful pen raised its character very high in Dublin."[5] The Dean may even have been instrumental in getting it played there so soon. *Mist's Weekly Journal* for April 20 says, "Mrs. Sterling, the Dublin Polly Peachum, is already 150l. the richer, and many Degrees handsomer for acting that Part." This indicates the popularity of the piece, as well as the esteem for the actress who appeared as the favorite heroine. We also find Mrs. Barbier playing Polly in Ireland, and

[5] *Recollections*, I, 31.

attracting much attention; Dublin needed no Fenton to make the play a wonderful success there. For instance, there was an occasional piece, to the tune of "Pretty Polly, say," in the form of "An Excellent New Ballad inscrib'd to the Irish Polly Peachum [Mrs. Barbier], On Her Benefit of the Beggar's Opera: Given, at The General Desire of the Nobility and Gentry of Dublin, April, XI, MD, CC, XXVIII. By a Person of Honour." It contains these significant lines:

No more ye *Antients* Dwell
On *Sapho's* Praise and Tell
She Sung —— She never Sung so well
As Our Polly Peachum.

Miss,[6] be no longer vain
Who with pleasing strain
In *Lincoln's House* did Charm the Train
Of *Belles* and *Beaux* united.

This piece is full of praise of the actress as Polly. One stanza runs:

Happy *Johnny Gay*
Whose Successful *Play*
Is made the *Theam* of all we say,
And our Pills for Melancholly,
But this is all
Due to Poll ——
When th' House is full ——
Who Drew them there but *Polly!*

Before it was seen in Dublin on the professional stage, however, if we are to accept the information of Hitchcock, *The Beggar's Opera* was brought out by Madame Violante with her company of children.[7] That historian speaks of the novelty and the crowded houses obtained through this extraordinary enterprise. As to the date of Madame Violante's arrival in Ireland, Hitchcock corrects the mistake of 1731, as sometimes previously fixed, saying she was there in 1727 at a booth for tumbling, rope dancing, etc., an establishment which she converted later into a playhouse, for regular plays and farces. When she formed her company of children she instructed them, according to the same writer, "in several petit pieces, and as the Beggar's Opera was then in high estimation, she perfected her Lilliputian troop in it."

[6] Fenton.
[7] *Irish Stage,* I, 47-48.

No doubt she was encouraged by those eager to see for the first time the piece which had been so highly praised away from home and which may have already become a favorite in print in their own country. At any rate the lady-manager who, according to Cooke, "varied her amusements to the floating caprices of taste," was wide awake to the timely interest of this new attraction. Genest says that

> having procured proper scenery, dresses, and decorations, she brought it out before it had been seen in Dublin —— the novelty of the sight, the uncommon abilities of the little performers, and the great merit of the piece, attracted the notice of the town to an extraordinary degree.[8]

It seems reasonable that the fame of the play as reported from London would justify such an effort to introduce it in Ireland under unusual circumstances. The principal characters, as given by Hitchcock, were: Macheath, Betty Barnes; Peachum, Sparks; Lockit, Beamsly; Filch, Barrington; Lucy, Ruth Jenks; Mrs. Peachum, Miss Mackay (Mackey in Genest), and Polly, Peg Woffington, her first appearance on any stage. Genest says the eldest was not above ten years of age, and remarks that several of them later became well-known players. Miss Barnes was undoubtedly the first female Macheath, a part afterwards taken by many prominent actresses.

[8] X, 288-289.

CHAPTER IV

THE SECOND SEASON

THE events which followed in the summer and autumn of 1728 in London show that enthusiasm for *The Beggar's Opera* had not greatly diminished. *Mist's Weekly Journal* for June 29 notes that "The Company who play the Beggar's Opera in the Hay-Market, with great applause, designs to divert the Town with the same again on Wednesday next." This newspaper also says, in its issue of August 31:

> We hear that Mr. Fielding, from the Theatre in Drury Lane, and Mr. Reynolds, belonging to the Hay-Market, will entertain the Town with the Beggar's Opera, at the George Inn in Smithfield, during the Time of Bartholomew-Fair.

Such irregular performances kept the interest fresh during the summer and early autumn, and prepared the way for another record run when Lincoln's Inn Fields theatre again opened its doors.

No new play was offered by Rich to the public in September. It was *The Beggar's Opera* which began the theatrical year, and, according to the *Dunciad* note, the piece "was received with equal applause in the following season." The original success, which had been immediate and sure, was now to prove its permanence. A new Polly was in the cast, for Fenton had left the stage in June; but Miss Warren was ready to attract the town in great, if secondary, glory and disprove the idea that the play was a success solely because of the charms of Rich's former star. The fact that *The Beggar's Opera* was produced as usual the very next fall proves its vitality in the original Polly's own time. She was no doubt missed by many, but neither Rich nor the public seems to have grumbled about it. Even if Miss Warren did not fully take the former Polly's place, the forty-three nights to her credit exclusive of the Lilliputian run show that the people had partially forgotten the creator of the part, and were good patrons of her successor. Besides, there was a second gentleman of fortune to take this second Polly from the stage.

Still looking for variety, the manager contrived to have the ever-favorite *Beggar's Opera* newly clothed for New Year's night, an

occasion of some importance, with the Prince of Wales present. On January 1, 1729, the piece was presented to a much-amused audience by a whole company of children, advertised as the Lilliputians, just organized, but perhaps suggested by the reports of Madame Violante's enterprise in Dublin. This performance was heralded by a paragraph in the *British Journal* for Saturday, November 30, 1728:

> We have Advice from the Theatre in Lincoln's Inn Fields, that the Beggar's Opera will speedily be acted there by a Sett of Children, whom the Master of the said House has collected with great Application from Several Parts of the Town; and that the Youngsters perform so well in their Rehearsals, that there is no doubt but the Town will be agreeably entertained by them.

Genest says the opera under these conditions was acted nine nights successively, and sixteen times in all, a run which was quite remarkable for its kind. The novelty of a play presented entirely by children, while not original, was fresh in London, and thus attracted by its very absurdity. Ryan gives £116, 10s. as the proceeds of the first night, and £37, 2s. as the lowest receipts, in sharp contrast to the returns from Shakespeare's *Macbeth,* acted shortly afterwards, amounting to only fourteen guineas.[1]

The *Craftsman* for January 11 ran the following brief review:

> The Town having been disappointed of the *Sequel* to the *Beggar's Opera,* which is said to be suppressed for *Reasons of State,*[2] Mr. Rich hath had the Address to convert the *1st Part* of it into a *new Entertainment,* by procuring a Sett of *Lilliputian Comedians,* who have already acted it, for several Nights, with universal Applause, and are thought to do it with as much Spirit and Grace, as any of the *Brobdignaggian Companies,* which have performed it this Year past, with such unparall'd Success.
>
> His Royal Highness the *Prince* continues frequently to honour both Theatres with his Presence: on *Tuesday* Night he was at *Lincoln's-Inn-Fields,* a second time, to see the *Beggar's Opera* perform'd by *Lilliputians.*

One of the issues of the first edition[3] gives the following cast of the juvenile company of 1729, indicating that they had attracted much attention:

[1] *Table Talk,* I, 255.

[2] See Chapter XX.

[3] A copy bearing the date of 1728, but belonging properly to 1728/9, after Jan. 1.

Peachum,	*Mary Shaftoe.*
Lockit and Nimming Ned,	*James Bencraft.*
Macheath,	*Elizabeth Binks.*
Filch, Ben Budge and Beggar,	*Henry Woodward.*
Crookfingered Jack and Wat Dreary,	*James Weeks.*
Robin of Bagshot,	*John Wilson.*
Harry Paddington and Player,	*Fisher Tench Charke.*
Mat of the Mint,	*John Verhuyck.*
Mrs. Peachum, Diana Trapes and Mrs. Slammekin,	*Esther Wherrit.*
Polly,	*Elizabeth Rogers.*
Lucy,	*Susanna Rogers.*
Mrs. Coaxer,	*Margaret Lowe.*
Dolly Trull,	*Sarah Foxwell.*
Mrs. Vixen,	*Mary Vincent.*
Betty Doxy,	*Mary Weyman.*
Jenny Diver,	*Margaret Gold.*
Suky Tawdry,	*Beatric[e] Boitar.*
Molly Brazen,	*Susanna Caun.*

This list shows that several parts were doubled, and in two cases even trebled, by the prolific Lilliputians, and also that the parts of Peachum and Macheath were acted by girls, another early forerunner of Colman's scheme at the Haymarket in 1781.[4]

In spite of the entertainment afforded by Rich's new invention, *The Beggar's Opera,* in a regular way, kept up a consistent popularity, being performed for the thirty-fifth time that season on February 24, and for the forty-third time on May 21, apparently exclusive of the Lilliputian run.[5] Forty-three nights by the Comedians plus sixteen by the children give a total of fifty-nine for the second season at Lincoln's Inn Fields, a count which is far ahead of most initial runs of the eighteenth century. During 1729 *The Beggar's Opera* alternated with Quin's representations in classical tragedy, the latter drawing crowds away from the unfortunate Drury Lane and to the Fields, probably largely because of the advertisement of the popular play continually running there. Dr. Doran, speaking of these classical

[4] See *post,* p. 78.
[5] Genest, III, 245.

tragedies which took the lead at Rich's theatre, says that they reaped no harvests, but that "the Beggar's Opera could always fill the house, whether Miss Cantrel warbled Polly, with the old cast, or children played all the parts—a foolish novelty not unattractive."

Cibber's testimony regarding the standing of the opera in 1729 is found in the epilogue to *Love in a Riddle:*

> . . . late Experience plainly shews,
> That Common Sense, and Ditty,
> Have ravish'd all the Belles, and Beaux,
> And charm'd the chaunting City.

A six-page poem published in 1729 under the name of "A Satyrical Poem: or, The Beggar's Opera Dissected" is full of evidence that Gay's play was then much in vogue. The writer tells how Polly charms and how the motley crowds are running to see the performance. Otway was once a favorite, he says,

> But now no Pity, not one Tragick Tear.
> The *Beggar's Jargon,* charmes the astonish'd Fair.

Other quotations are illuminating:

> Rouze then ye *Britons!* Rouse at *Shakspear's* Call,
> His *Hamlet* suffers, by this spurious Droll.
> A Beggar Poet, now has found an Art,
> Of pleasing Thousands, with a *Tyburn* Cart.
>
> Let poor *Orestes* fret, run mad and rail,
> And in his Fury, seize a lusty Flail.
> Let him turn Highwayman, Thief or Pickpocket,
> For lost *Hermione,* here's *Lucy Lockit.*
>
> For here the Million gape and flutter,
> To hear a Common Hussey splutter,
> Spurious Nonsense, thoughtless Rhimes,
> Borrow'd Tunes, of Ancient Times.

From several sources we discover that during the second season *The Beggar's Opera* was again successfully played in Ireland. Hitchcock says that

> its fame quickly reached this kingdom, where it experienced, everything considered, equal success;[6] for we find it advertised for the benefit of Mr. Vanderbank, a favourite comedian, December 28th, 1728, for the fortieth time, inde-

[6] That is, with the London run.

pendent of the many nights it was exhibited by Madame Violante's Lilliputian Company.[7]

If Madame Violante did not put on the play with her troupe of children early in 1728, she produced it at least during the year. Ball, the editor of Swift's letters, quotes a passage from a contemporary Irish newspaper about Thomas Griffith, a well-known actor in Dublin, who had several benefit performances of *The Beggar's Opera* during the famous run there:

"Last night," says the 'Dublin Intelligencer' of 3 December 1728, "for the benefit of Mr. Griffith, the Beggar's Opera was the thirty-eighth time acted here before the largest and finest assembly that ever appeared at that diverting entertainment. Mr. Griffith spoke a pleasing prologue on the masterly improvements of the English poets, but more particularly on the celebrated performance of Mr. Gay."[8]

The Beggar's Opera was introduced to Scotland during the summer of 1728. There is a record of its being put on at Glasgow in August, by seceding members of Tony Aston's company, which had been playing at Edinburgh. The performance was given in the Weigh House, in spite of the protests of the clergy of the city against dramatic entertainments. Another early performance in Scotland is reported by J. C. Dibdin, quoting from the *Courant* of October 22-24, 1728:

At the desire of several of the nobility and gentry of East Lothian, the Beggar's Opera will be acted at Haddington, by Mr. Phipps and the rest of that company of comedians, who have been so happy as to please the ladies and noblemen of this country last sessions. To begin at four o'clock.

Dibdin adds, "It is worthy of note that this was in the year that the Beggar's Opera first saw the light in London."[9]

[7] *Irish Stage,* I, 42-43.
[8] Swift's *Corresp.,* V, 220, note.
[9] *Annals of Edinburgh Stage,* p. 42.

CHAPTER V

THE OPERA HOLDS THE STAGE[1]

THE real test of *The Beggar's Opera* came in the first decade after the original production. As the early years went by the Newgate comedy was not found wanting. In fact, by the time of Gay's death in 1732 the piece had settled down as a stock attraction, continuing to hold the stage.

1730. On March 19, 1730, over two years after he had given up the part to Walker, Quin performed Macheath for his benefit, "at the particular desire of several persons of quality." According to the *Life of Quin*[2] and the *Thespian Dictionary* he received £206, 9s. 6d., considerably more than the proceeds of an ordinary night. Was it *The Beggar's Opera,* or Quin in *The Beggar's Opera,* which nearly doubled the amounts from both of his benefits of 1728 and 1729—£102, 18s. and £129, 3s.? This seems to have been Quin's sole performance in the piece, and he may have played then only to show what he could do with the part he had once declined.

References to *The Beggar's Opera* in 1730 prove that its popularity had not begun to wane, even if there were those who were willing to poke fun at it. "The Metamorphosis of the Town: or, A View of the Present Fashions," in verse, says,

> Let's read the Bill, the Town's Delight,
> The *Beggar's Opera,* to Night.

The people mentioned go to the performance, but, tiring of mere sound and show, after "Two tedious Acts" leave

> . . . this Clitter Clatter,
> Of Ballad Fragments, without Matter,

and a play which has "Nor Sense, nor Moral, Plot, nor End." A different sort of work, "The Music Speech at the Public Commence-

[1] From this point only the more important or interesting performances and runs are recorded. A full table of dates would go into the thousands.

[2] Supplement, p. 78.

ment in Cambridge, July 6, MDCCXXX," by John Taylor,[3] mentions "*Polly Peachum* stroll'd to *Sturbridge* Fair." Although a writer in the *Grubstreet Journal*,[4] referring to this Commencement Poem, sees in the allusion only the idea of finding out "a Polly Peachum under any covering," the phrase bespeaks the widespread familiarity with Gay's production and his characters, by name. In fact, the play was enough in the public mind to cause the Duke of Wharton to refer, in a letter of this year, to several of his friends by names taken from characters in *The Beggar's Opera*. There is mention of Polly Peachum, Crookfingered Jack, Nimming Ned, and Bob Booty. A footnote to the letter as published says:

> The Duke grew fond of the *Beggar's Opera* when abroad,[5] and he and his Acquaintance fell into that humorous way, and gave one another the same or the like Names and Characters.

1731. *The Beggar's Opera* was still prominent in 1731. In the *Gentleman's Magazine* for November (probably copied from the *Grubstreet Journal*, November 18, where it is also found) "a young gentleman of Cambridge" furnishes, under the title of "The Modern Poets," some suggestive lines:

> Yet for unstudied humor Gay shall please,
> Who on the barren'st subject writes with ease.
> The theatre his just applauses rings,
> When sense with manly voice his Mackheath sings.
> Then Senesino warbles but in vain
> And soft Cutzona yields to Polly's strain.

1732. Pearce (apparently getting his information from R. J. Smith's theatrical records) gives two interesting performances of the play at Lincoln's Inn Fields in 1732: in March, on behalf "of a gentleman of Eaton School," at £154, 2s.; and in May, for the benefit "of the servants on account of their arrears," at £66, 7s.[6]

Peg Woffington made her first appearance in London in *The Beggar's Opera*. The following notice from the *Daily Post*, September 4, 1732, will explain the performance, as well as show her unusual trebling of parts:

[3] London, 1730.
[4] Dec. 17, 1730.
[5] Through an early edition, not a stage performance.
[6] *Polly Peachum*, p. 198.

At the particular Desire of several persons of Quality. For the Benefit of the famous Signora Violante, who has just arrived with the new extraordinary fine Company at the New Theatre in the Haymarket, this present Monday, being the 4th of September, will be presented the most surprising performances that were ever shown in the English theatre. To which is added *The Beggar's Opera* after the Irish manner, which was performed 96 times in Dublin with great applause. The part of *Macheath* by the celebrated Miss Woffington; *Mr. Peachum,* Mr. Morrice; *Mr. Lockit,* Mr. Daly; *Filch,* Mr. Roan; *Mat o' the Mint,* Mr. Dease; *Polly Peachum,* Miss Jennie; *Mrs. Peachum,* Miss Woffington; *Miss Lucy Lockit,* Miss Corbally; *Mrs. Diana Trapes,* Miss Woffington, and all the other parts to the best advantage.

This appearance of the Irish actress as Macheath anticipates her triumph in the stock character of Sir Harry Wildair and other "breeches parts." According to Wyndham, the cast on this occasion presented a shortened version of Gay's piece.[7] There is nothing in the newspaper announcement to indicate this, but "after the Irish manner" may imply the suggested change.

Late in 1732 Rich moved his theatrical company to the newly built Covent Garden theatre, and the old house at Lincoln's Inn Fields dropped into the background. *The Beggar's Opera* was not the first piece to be produced, but it was the second, appearing on December 7, three days after Gay's death. Ryan, overlooking the first performance, says Miss Norsa (he has Noram) appeared in Polly as early as the ninth night at the new theatre, which would be December 16.[8] This agrees with the date of Genest for Miss Norsa's first appearance, for he puts her run of twenty consecutive nights between December 16 and January 11. Wyndham records her participation in the first *Beggar's Opera* performance at Covent Garden, on December 7, with a subsequent run of twenty nights, after which a transfer was made to Lincoln's Inn Fields, perhaps with a new cast.[9] Genest is evidently not sure about his records here, remarking that the playbill says that during the run of *The Beggar's Opera* the company acted at Lincoln's Inn Fields, but "this is not quite so clearly expressed as might be wished—it appears however certain that both theatres were open in the Christmas Holidays for some few nights."

[7] *Annals of C.G.,* I, 77.
[8] *Table Talk,* I, 255.
[9] *Annals of C.G.,* I, 30-31.

To furnish competition the managers of Drury Lane arranged to stage a rival company in *The Beggar's Opera,* and on December 16 Gay's piece was acted at this theatre for the first time. After three nights, according to Ryan, "the contest ended, and the piece continued at Covent Garden through twenty nights."[10] Rich, with his new theatre and his ever-popular play, still had the ascendancy, and *The Beggar's Opera,* in its changed environment, was given a fresh start. Miss Norsa as Polly became a general favorite. Pearce says that she was honored by royalty on two occasions, and that at her benefit later in the year (true, if the theatrical season is meant—May 26, 1733)[11] the receipts were £142, 3s., "only a few pounds less than the original Polly obtained when she took her second benefit."[12]

To Hogarth has been credited a picture celebrating the occasion of the removal to the new playhouse, "Rich's Glory, or his Triumphant Entry into Covent Garden." Nichols quotes some of the verses below the picture, among them these lines:

> To the Piazza let us turn our eyes,
> See Johnny Gay on porters' shoulders rise,
> Whilst a bright man of Tast his works despise.[13]

Nichols remarks that the man using *The Beggar's Opera* in a contemptuous manner is apparently meant for Pope, because the letter P is above his head; but he offers no reason for this inconsistency except that one might get a notion from Dr. Johnson's life of the dramatist that the little poet was jealous of Gay's success with his play. Wright (who gives the date of Rich's removal as 1733 instead of 1732) says "we are probably justified in supposing the poet, jealous (as usual with him) of the extraordinary success of his old friend, had expressed an unfavorable opinion of his production."[14] Nichols suggests that Hogarth's satire here may have been wanton or founded on idle report. All these notions, however, are hardly to be accepted, in view of the letters of Pope to Gay during the latter's last days, and especially in 1732, the year of his death. As to Gay

[10] *Table Talk,* I, 255-256.
[11] *Polly Peachum,* p. 198.
[12] *Ibid.,* p. 256.
[13] *Anecdotes of Hogarth,* pp. 163-164.
[14] *Caricature Hist. of Georges,* p. 87.

"on porters' shoulders,"—Rich's removal to Covent Garden will always seem connected with the good fortune of *The Beggar's Opera.*

1733. Arbuthnot wrote to Swift, on January 13, 1733, after Gay's death, "I believe the Beggar's Opera, and what he [Gay] has to come upon the stage [*Achilles*], will make the sum of the diversions of the town for some time to come."

The *Caledonian Mercury* for June 4, 1733, had this notice:

> We are assured that the Edinburgh Company of Players will open their house on Wednesday next, the 6th inst., with the Beggar's Opera; and that they have unanimously agreed to act on Wednesday night, the 13th, for the benefit of the Edinburgh Infirmary; the whole profits arising from that night's performance to be given in to the managers of that hospital without the least drawback.[15]

The Beggar's Opera was played on June 13, as announced.

A startling example of the roving disposition of *The Beggar's Opera* early in its career is found in the Jamaica performances of 1733. Chetwood, writing in 1749, has the fullest details of this venture across the sea, with its truly colonial aspects, and its tragic culmination.[16] He says, with the characteristic brevity of some of the older dramatic historians, that

> a Company, in the Year 1733, came there, and clear'd a large Sum of Money; where they might have made moderate Fortunes, if they had not been too busy with the Growth of the Country. They receiv'd 370 Pistoles[17] the first Night, to the *Beggar's Opera;* but within the Space of two Months they bury'd their third *Polly,* and two of their Men.

1735. On March 11, 1735, at Covent Garden, there was "a serio-comical-farcical-Elysian Ballad Opera" in two acts,—*Macheath in the Shades, or Bayes at Parnassus.* It was acted only once, apparently, and was probably never printed. Genest furnishes a cast of characters, which includes several players who acted in the original production of *The Beggar's Opera:*

Macheath,	*Stoppelear.*
Bayes,	*Chapman.*
Polly,	*Miss Norsa.*
Alexander,	*Mullart.*

[15] From Dibdin's *Edinburgh Stage,* p. 43.
[16] *Hist. of Stage,* pp. 40-41.
[17] Nearly $1,500.

Peachum,	*Hippisley.*
Sejanus,	*Paget.*
Charon,	*Morgan.*
Cardinal Wolsey,	*Houghton.*
Mat o' the Mint,	*Clark.*
Ben Johnson,	*Ashton.*
Horace,	*Hignell.*
Cleopatra,	*Mrs. Templar.*
Jenny Diver,	*Miss Binks.*
Slammekin,	*Mrs. Kilby.*
Thalestris,	*Mrs. Forrester.*
Mrs. Trapes,	*Mrs. Martin.*
Hellen,	*Miss S. Rogers.*
Mercury,	*Hale.*

1736. We learn from an interesting playbill in the *Daily Post*[18] that at Walker's benefit performance of *The Beggar's Opera* on March 15, 1736, at Covent Garden, there were

> entertainments of singing and dancing, particularly End of Act I. A comic dance by Mons. Nivelon and Mrs. Le Brun. Act II. A comic dance by Mons. Nivelon, Mons. Lalanze, Mrs. Laguerre, and Mrs. Le Brun. In Act III a Hornpipe, by Mr. Ferguson. End of the Opera. A two part Song beginning, "As I saw fair Clora," sung by Mr. Beard and Mr. Salway.

The same newspaper shows two ballad operas on one night (March 19) at Drury Lane, *The Beggar's Opera* and, by desire, *The Devil to Pay,* with entertainments of dancing.

From *The Modern Poet. A Rapsody,* printed in 1736,[19] we hear how people have now resumed their taste for Italian music, which they do not understand, and "*Italian* Strains again the Town delight." The lingering force of the rival opera of Gay, however, is plainly suggested; and the original popularity is definitely described in the following couplet:

> Gay bless'd his Stars, so well his Labours took,
> And sixty Nights his crouded Theatre shook.

Most peculiar of all the instances of *The Beggar's Opera* as a play

[18] March 15, 1736.
[19] Second ed.

for persons who had never before acted on the stage is this one, told of in Richard Hooker's *Weekly Miscellany,* June 26, 1736:

We shall transcribe from one of the Daily Papers, the following verbatim; not with an intention to promote the interest of the person, so much as to express our Wonder, that a *gentlewoman* of seventy-two years of age, can find nothing more suitable to her years and Case, than the Part she has chosen, so unbecoming of both.

"We hear that on Saturday next, the 26th of this Month, the Beggar's Opera is to be performed at the Haymarket theatre, for the benefit of a gentlewoman who is seventy-two years of age; yet notwithstanding, she intends to perform the character of Diana Trapes, being the first time of her appearance on the Stage. Several persons of Quality having honored her with their Interest, she hopes other gentlemen and Ladies, who frequent Plays, will favour her with their Companies on this *extraordinary* occasion." ——— Let us add, that we hope this New-Old Diana Trapes (if there can be such an Intention in a Person of these years! and of that Sex! and who never appeared on a stage before!) will make a Reserve from her gains on this truly *extraordinary* occasion, for purchasing for herself a Coffin and Shroud, by far more proper to be thought of by her, than what she has chosen to attempt.

CHAPTER VI

THE CLIVE-CIBBER CONTROVERSY

THE celebrated controversy between Kitty Clive and Susannah Maria Cibber, over the part of Polly, came to its climax in 1736. Mrs. Clive, who had played Polly as early as 1732, resented the aspiration of the inexperienced Mrs. Cibber, wife of Theophilus Cibber, to act that character; and a quarrel, as strong as that of Polly and Lucy themselves over Macheath, began at Drury Lane. The dispute soon got into the papers, where during November and December letters and verses grew thick in praise of the favorite or discredit of the pretender.

The first step in print seems to have been taken by the *Spectator's* letter of November 4, in the *Daily Gazetteer,* on behalf of Mrs. Clive. A reply to this appeared on November 25 in the *Grubstreet Journal,* on the side of Mrs. Cibber. Some of the statements are worth quoting:

> I know, that it has been matter of some surprize to a great many, that Mr. Fletewood, having an Actress who is so capable of being an excellent Polly, as Mrs. Cibber seems naturally to be formed for, never acts the Beggar's Opera; by which means the Town loses a good Entertainment and possibly the manager a great deal of money: both which inconveniences might be very easily remedied, and that without any wrong to Mrs. Clive, even though Mrs. Cibber was to play the part of Polly. . . . If Mrs. Cibber should happen to excell Mrs. Clive in the performance of the character contested for, I submit it to my readers, if it would not have been an injury to the town in general, and to Mrs. Cibber in particular, to have enviously prevented her from receiving the praises which she would have merited, and the town the pleasure which in justice it ought to have received. . . .
>
> If it be admitted that Mrs. Clive is fitter both for the part of Polly than Mrs. Cibber; yet it must also be granted, that she is *most fit* for the character of Lucy: and truly *it seems to be a very fair* proposal, that the Rivals should alternately perform the character contested for.
>
> If Mr. Fletewood refused 1000£ for the run Polly would have had in the person of Mrs. Cibber, every one I believe will allow, that he has shown too

great a respect for Mrs. Clive, by Gratifying her ill-humors after so very extraordinary a manner.

I shall only add, that the Town is, upon the whole matter, absolute to judge who most deserves its resentment for the loss of an Entertainment that it likes; and likewise to determine, whether the superior ability for the performance of the character is most imaginary in Mrs. Cibber, or Mrs. Clive.

The same issue of the *Grubstreet Journal* for November 25 reprinted the following verses from the *Daily Advertiser:* "An Epigram on the late Battle of the Female Dancers at Paris, and on the two Rival Ladies (for the part of Polly) here."

Two Rivals in Theatrick fame
  Fell out in France—and fight;
Two Nymphs in England did the same,
  But, cooler, chose to write.

Their Nation each Example shows,
  Courageous That, This witty;
The Frenchmen back their Cause with Blows,
  But Englishmen with Treaty.

This piece was also copied in *Fog's Weekly Journal* for November 27 and in the *Craftsman* for December 4, which contains some additional verses suggesting the more prudent means of settlement by treaty.

In the *Grubstreet Journal* for Thursday, December 9, is a letter by Theophilus Cibber, himself, addressed to Mrs. Clive, apparently in answer to one she has published, or caused to represent her. Several statements are significant: "You profess yourself, Madam, wholly ignorant of the Author of a Letter inserted in the Gazetteer of November 4th: which Letter did first make publick any Dispute about the cast of the Beggar's Opera . . ." He says the controversy "would have still been the discourse of the Green Room if the letter of your *unknown* friend had not made it a very important point; and threatened to have drawn on the Director of the Theatre the Publick Resentment of the town." He says "the Manager from his regard to you dropped the performance of the Beggar's Opera, when he found removing you from the part of Polly, was distasteful to you." Cibber tries to explain that his wife is not the rival of Clive for the part of Polly, and that it is not "a contest between Mrs. Clive and Mrs. Cibber, but, indeed, rather a dispute between Mrs. Clive's will and

the Manager's right." He hopes his letter will close the controversy. He insists that this is the first and only one he has written on the subject. Much of the effect of all this argument, however, is considerably weakened when we suspect that a good deal of the intermediate controversial matter was prepared by Mrs. Cibber's own husband.

A Mediator puts in his word in the *Grubstreet Journal* for December 16, telling how "Here has the Town been pester'd this month past, with the Dispute between two actresses about who shall play the Part of Polly in the Beggar's Opera." He says it could have been cut short long ago if the manager had not listened to the proposal with regard to Cibber, and kept his former Polly. He asserts that "should the Town be weak enough to be wrought on by that kind of magic to insist on the Beggar's Opera in the shape he and his cabal cou'd wish it, the consequences may prove dangerous, perhaps fatal." He adds that "as things are, the Town cannot reasonably insist on a performance, that which way soever represented, must be productive of tumult, but will rest satisfied with its suppression till another season, when ill humors may be subsided, or the *Fair Rivals* on different stages.—In the meantime, a manager wou'd do well to soften their disappointment by the appearance of some new Piece, which indeed 'tis time to expect from him." We learn even from a letter like this how *The Beggar's Opera* was staying on in competition, and was surpassing the new plays or relieving others of their necessity. In the same paper of December 16 appeared a poem of "Advice to Mrs. Clive."

The affair was still the talk of the town on the very eve of the performance of the play so much discussed. The *Grubstreet Journal* for December 30 has a column of "Instances of Actors condescending to give up Parts, in which they had been well received, entirely to promote the general interest of the Theatre." The writer says that "surely the Manager of a Theatre Royal will show his skill in casting the parts of the Beggar's Opera and not leave any of his best performers out of it." The very next day the manager offered *The Beggar's Opera* as if nothing had happened, and the play did not undergo "suppression till another season." Whether there was some agreement about the alternate acting of the part it is hard to tell; but for this

time the squabble was decided in favor of Clive and the piece was performed before an audience eager to welcome her again as Polly.

It is difficult to say definitely which deserved the character, yet Clive will perhaps have our sympathy. She was probably the better actress, even if Cibber was the better singer. Victor considered Clive better for Lucy and favored Cibber for the leading rôle, and he expresses this opinion in a letter to Theophilus Cibber, quoted by Genest.[1] He says

> it would undoubtedly have been a fine entertainment so performed—but Clive was then in possession of the public voice—she was disgusted at the thoughts of losing Polly, and lodged her complaint—what a storm was raised! but their favourite, right or wrong, was to be supported, tho' against judgment and common sense.

He adds that "the only opportunity of seeing the Beggar's Opera in perfection was lost." This is not correct, as Genest points out, for the two women later performed together in *The Beggar's Opera* on several occasions. When they did finally join forces their combined singing and acting must have furnished a feature as sensational as superb.

1737. The controversy was over by January 13, 1737, if we may believe the letter of *Amicus* (a friend of Mrs. Cibber) in the *Grub-street Journal* for that date. He speaks of certain things which it will be "unnecessary to mention now the contest is at an end." But it remained for Henry Fielding to make material out of the dispute for his *The Historical Register for 1736,* produced in May, 1737. In Act II, Sc. i, Pistol [Theophilus Cibber] enters with a mob, which he addresses thus:

> Associates, brethren, countrymen, and friends,
> Partakers, with us in this glorious enterprize,
> Which for our consort we have undertaken;
> It grieves me much, yes by the gods it does!
> That we whose great ability and parts
> Have rais'd us to this pinnacle of power,
> Entitling us prime minister theatrical;
> That we shou'd with an upstart of the stage
> Contend successless on our consort's side;
> But tho' by just hereditary right
> We claim a lawless power, yet for some reasons,

[1] III, 510.

Which to ourself we keep as yet concealed;
Thus to the publick, deign we to appeal:
Behold how humbly the great Pistol kneels.
Say then, Oh Town, is it your royal will,
That my great consort represent the part
Of Polly Peachum in the Beggar's Opera.

The hiss of the mob he takes to be assent. In Act III, Sourwit, a critic, says, "Heyday! What's become of your two Pollys." Medley replies, "Damn'd, Sir, damn'd."

The most important fruits of the Polly controversy, however, were the production and publication of *The Beggar's Pantomime, or the Contending Columbines*. This skit, written by Woodward, under his stage name of Lun, Jr., was performed by Giffard's company at Lincoln's Inn Fields on December 3, 1736, on several other nights during that month, and again on January 3, 1737. Its appearance was timely, since the controversy, in talk and in print, attracted the minds of all. Rich would naturally be eager to take advantage of the affair to fill his own house; perhaps now with special satisfaction because the excitement was all about the play he had accepted at second-hand after the managers of Drury Lane, nearly nine years before.

The cast of characters as given in the third edition is as follows:

Harlequin Macheath,	*Lun, Jr.*
Manager,	*Cox.*
Beggar,	*Hewitt.*
Deputy Manager,	*Mrs. Charke.*
Mat o' the Mint,	*Richardson.*
Squire Rustick,	*Yates.*
Clown,	*Penkethman.*
Ghost of Gay,	*Lyon.*
Polly,	*Mrs. Roberts.*
A Pretender to Polly,	*Mrs. Hamilton.*
Jenny Diver,	*Mrs. Dove.*
Molly Brazen,	*Mrs. Haughton.*
Suky Tawdry,	*Miss Tollett.*
Mrs. Slammekin,	*Miss Thornowets.*

The part of Pistol was probably played by Woodward, according to Genest.

Woodward dedicates his piece to the two Rival Columbines, declaring himself a stranger to both, which was merely a shift, because he had even acted with Clive. Two passages reflect the tone of the preface. The author says, "Your Paper Was making such a Bustle about Town, and its being so much the public Talk of Coffe-houses, I thought it no bad Scheme, to make use of the opportunity, and introduce something, like your contention, upon our Stage;" he speaks, later, of "a little gentleman of your acquaintance,"[2] who said "this Trifle had nothing to support it but Scandal . . . but the Speech wou'd have come easier from any other Person than him, considering whatever Scandal it contains was extracted from the several Letters published in this mimick Controversy." This last statement suggests that the character of Pistol, as added, was drawn up to fit Cibber's activity on behalf of his wife, both at the theatre and in the public press. Mrs. Roberts, as Polly, represents Mrs. Clive, and Mrs. Hamilton, as a Pretender to Polly, represents Mrs. Cibber. The whole sketch favors Mrs. Clive, and pokes fun at the other side, with no bitter satire.

The Prologue consists of verses to the air of "Chevy Chase." These three stanzas (the third, fifth, and fourteenth) are characteristic:

Cibber, the Syren of the Stage,
  A Vow to Heav'n did make,
Full twenty nights in Polly's part,
  She'd make the Play-house shake.

I, who have charm'd the Pit so low,[3]
  And eke the Gallery high,
Shall I be rivall'd thus? Ye Gods!
  O rather let me die.

Now cry'd the Manager so wise,
  Whom actors all obey;
"Pathetick Cibber, Lucy you,
  "Pert Clive shall Polly play."

The first three scenes of the Comic Interlude (like most of the rest) consist of harlequin horseplay, of no special bearing here, except in the way of *Beggar's Opera* parody, both of songs and situations. The

[2] Theophilus Cibber.
[3] Mrs. Roberts.

fourth scene is in Newgate, where a dialogue is held between the Beggar and the Prompter on the subject of the trouble between the actresses. One speech of the Beggar runs: "And so the Town must be disappointed of the best Entertainment it ever saw, upon a Punctilio of Precedency." In the song to the tune of "Gossip Joan," Mrs. Hamilton sings:

I know you'd fain prevail,
And rob the Town of Polly,
Your dark Design shall fa—il,
And only shew your Folly,
Madam Squall.

In Song iii Mrs. Roberts sings (aside),

Sure 'twou'd break my Heart,
To lose so sweet a Part.

In Song iv, to the tune of "My love is all madness and Folly," Mrs. Hamilton sings,

I will prevail
And act my darling Polly;

and thus exposes the help of Cibber in the cause of his wife,

My little Man
Does all he can,
To get the Town to sue —— Ma'am,
That Polly may be mine.

In Song v, to the same tune as "Cease your funning," the manager declares they shall do the part alternately, a promise not carried out in actual life. Then he wavers between them, saying of Mrs. Hamilton,

Had Gay but known her
He'd have shewn her,
Polly was design'd for her.

He is about to decide against Mrs. Roberts, when the Ghost of Gay rises, called from the grave by the excessive noise. The apparition recites, among others, these lines:

> Let me prevail, and cast the Part myself,
> In justice to the Town, and this my Piece;
> No soft Italian squeaks, by all despised,
> And once condemn'd, can ever rise again,
> Or hope to please even in a Ballad-Song.
> In vain shall strutting Arrogance, with senseless
> Prose, or Pot gun Pride, endeavor to impose
> On this good Town, or take the Part from thee.[4]

The ghost, before sinking, tells Mrs. Roberts not to listen to the manager, who seems doubtful about what to do. This becomes a final judgment which the manager silently confirms as most pleasing to the town. The remaining scenes are mainly harlequinade parodying *Beggar's Opera* material.

In the additional "Pistol in Mourning," Pistol, asleep and leaning against a table with his wife, soliloquizes thus in noble blank verse:

> But see, great *Polly* comes, triumphant,
> She'll smile, to see such Innocence in Tears,
> And glory in the Conquest she has made;
> Let's in my Dove, there with mutual Sorrow
> We'll indulge our Grief, and mourn the Loss . . .

Such an outcome was not all fiction; Cibber did have to go into mourning when the manager decided in favor of Mrs. Clive.

[4] Mrs. Roberts.

CHAPTER VII

THE LONG RUN THROUGH THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

IT is no little tribute to the dramatic success of Gay that *The Beggar's Opera* was played in every year of the eighteenth century after 1728. Of the many performances from 1737 to 1800 some are of minor interest, of course, but others deserve special consideration.

1737-40. From 1737 to 1740 *The Beggar's Opera* was much in demand as an occasional play. Four examples will demonstrate its current popularity.[1] On August 2, 1737, at Lincoln's Inn Fields (a late performance there for Gay's piece), it was acted at the *particular desire* of several Ladies of Quality. On November 9, 1739, at Drury Lane, it was given at the *particular desire* of several persons of quality. On October 24, 1740, at the *desire* of several persons of distinction, it was performed at Drury Lane; and on November 3, at the same house, it was put on at the *particular desire* of several persons of distinction.

There was a big bill at Goodman's Fields on December 31, 1740, when, according to Genest, *The Beggar's Opera* started on a run of thirteen nights in succession. The opera was inserted between two parts of a concert, and there were, in addition, a pantomime entertainment and *The Triumphs of Love,* a pastoral. So full an evening's program suggests a special arrangement; one of the newspapers does speak of the pantomime and the pastoral as being performed gratis for the diversion of those taking part.[2]

1741. In his *Anecdotes of Hogarth,*[3] Nichols tells of an advertisement of a *Beggar's Opera* performance at the Haymarket for the benefit of Mrs. Careless, on October 27, 1741. Her bid for attendance, inserted in the *Daily Post* of October 21, was continued in the

[1] Information from B.M. newspaper cuttings relating to D.L., etc.

[2] *Daily Post.* See *Polly Peachum,* p. 276.

[3] P. 270.

bill for the day. That this notorious woman, a coffeehouse keeper of "the Playhouse Passage, Bridges-Street," should select Gay's piece is a striking suggestion of the full possession the play may have had of all classes of society, even at this date.

1743-44. Oliver Cashel revived *The Beggar's Opera* at Covent Garden in 1743 (November 7). Chetwood, writing in 1749, says he has heard this actor "has so far excelled in Captain Macheath in the Beggar's Opera (which requires a good Singer, to the Qualifications of a good Actor), that his Merit has given this excellent Piece a large fresh run in Covent-garden." During the next month, Mrs. Clive was playing Polly to Beard's Macheath, in a performance which Dr. Doran says "charmed the auditors, and gave them pleasant memories for a long time to come." The season of 1743-44 was one of rivalry, both houses producing Gay's piece.

1745. Mrs. Cibber acted Polly, her much-coveted part, three times at Covent Garden in December, 1745 (14, 16, and 17), as a benefit for the relief of the veterans of the Scottish rebellion. Rich gave free use of his house, the players lent their services gratis, and the tallow-chandlers furnished the lights. Consequently the manager was able to turn over to the fund at Guildhall over six hundred pounds. Genest says Mrs. Cibber "published a letter to state that she had offered by letter and by advertisement to play Polly at Drury Lane three nights for the Veteran Scheme."

1747. On September 17, 1747, *The Beggar's Opera* was produced at Drury Lane with occasional prologue and epilogue. These may not have been the first of their kind; and there are several examples of later ones. Even if Gay had conformed to the opera type by deciding "to have neither Prologue nor Epilogue,"[4] the theatrical managers were not slow in dressing up the piece to suit themselves. Genest says the play ran from the opening of the theatre to October 17, which would be the extent of a whole month.

Writing in this same year, Thomas Whincop declares that *The Beggar's Opera* "has continued to be constantly acted ever since [the first season], with the same Success."[5]

According to Wilkinson, *The Beggar's Opera* was repeated for several nights at Covent Garden in 1747, with Beard as Macheath.

[4] See Intro. to play.

[5] *List of Plays*, p. 238.

He says that it drew more money than any other play to the deserted house of Covent Garden at that time.[6]

1750. On September 11, 1750, at Drury Lane, *The Beggar's Opera* was performed with a prologue by Garrick. On October 18 an epilogue for Mrs. Clive was used.

It was in 1750 that Adam Hallam, an actor, and uncle of another Polly, Mrs. Mattocks, translated *The Beggar's Opera* into French and had it produced at the Haymarket by the French comedians, Jean Monnet and company. The printed version of that year says that Gay's piece, as *L'Opera du Gueux,* has been "Représentée sur le Petit Theatre François Dans le Marché au Foin." The play met with little success, possibly because it was, as a London pamphlet of 1750 called it, "a most wretched, execrable translation." Claude-Pierre Patu, who made another translation in 1756, says in his preface that the Haymarket version was by a German who knew neither English nor French, and that it was unanimously hooted at by the English themselves. The play was a very literal copy, even in the songs.

Hallam later took his translation to Paris to put it on the stage, but failed in the attempt. It has been said that the refusal of the French managers was due to objections raised against the ending of the piece; and that Hallam, after declining to alter the play and hang Macheath, brought it back to London in disdain. No doubt the French translation itself, as criticized by Patu and others, was more to blame.

The record of American performances of *The Beggar's Opera* begins with 1750. Discussion of them, however, is reserved for a later chapter.[7]

1751. A series of performances of the opera in 1751 is mentioned by Pearce.[8] He speaks of fourteen nights, consecutive but for two, with Lowe as Macheath and a gentlewoman as Polly. The first with this cast was on October 29, when the play concluded "with a country dance by the characters of the Opera." On the fifteenth night Mrs. Chambers, who may have been the *gentlewoman* of the playbills, appeared as Polly.

1754. Once more the popularity of *The Beggar's Opera* is attested

[6] *Memoirs,* IV, 137-138.
[7] See Chapter X.
[8] *Polly Peachum,* p. 279.

by this quotation from the London *Evening Advertiser,* April 9, 1754:

> The following is part of a letter from our correspondent at Bath, dated April 6. Our polite assembly, chagrined at the loss of a principal amusement, have contrived to elude the tenor of the act against strolling comedians, by commanding a concert this evening at Orchard-street theatre, with which the managers have assumed the liberty of giving *gratis,* the Beggar's Opera, and it is reported that on Easter Monday the other house also will be opened upon the strength of the same evasion.

1755. The *Sussex Weekly Advertiser, or Lewes Journal,* for June 30, 1755, contained this advertisement:

> By a Company of Comedians from the Theatres Royal in London, at the New Play-House in Lewes, this *present* Evening will be presented, The Beggar's Opera. . . . To conclude with a country dance by the characters of the Opera.

The farce of *The Lying Valet* was a part of the program, which began at six-thirty.

1756-57. Two players of prominence, Mr. and Mrs. Wilder, of Drury Lane, made their first appearance in Ireland as Macheath and Polly on December 17, 1756. Genest says

> they brought the Beggar's Opera once more into fashion, and occasioned it to be performed once a week during the season, upwards of twenty nights, besides benefits, to crowded houses —— their success in these characters induced the manager to get up the Oracle, which was played with singular applause.[9]

Gay's piece seems to have been able to float almost anything, just as it was often able to start a run for itself at a critical time. A new song was introduced by Wilder as Macheath, "Cock-and-a-Bull." This, according to a note in Whyte's *Collection of Poems,*[10] "became a great favourite and contributed greatly to the support of the opera, both this and the ensuing season."[11] The same book tells how "long after the Beggar's Opera continued in fashion."[12] Cooke states that Wilder as Macheath "gained such reputation that he performed it seventeen times successively the first season and nearly as many more the next, besides on summer excursions, where he met with the same

[9] X, 409.
[10] P. 294.
[11] 1756-57 and 1757-58.
[12] P. 91.

encouragement."[13] Although he says this was about 1758, he probably refers to the run given by Genest. Wilkinson credits Wilder with playing Macheath forty nights in Dublin, in 1756-57.[14]

1759. The revival of *The Beggar's Opera* at Covent Garden in 1759 brought good money. The play, beginning on October 10, ran for thirty-seven consecutive nights, except one, Monday, November 5, when the customary performance of *Tamerlane,* to celebrate Guy Fawkes' night, took place, November 4 having been on Sunday. The *Monthly Mirror,* in a note to the performance of October 10, says, "The amazing success of this opera, on the present revival, which was performed 53 nights in the course of the season, was owing to the vocal talents of Miss Brent, whose performance of Polly was most notably seconded by the Macheath of Mr. Beard." For popularity and for proceeds in the eighteenth century, this run ranks next to the original in 1728. Cooke says, "Miss Brent, afterwards Pinto, sung it better, and brought more money by far, than any since the first season of its exhibition," and, again, that "Beard, in conjunction with the Polly of Miss Brent, run a whole season, almost with as much celebrity as in the original cast."[15] Dr. Arne had proposed to Garrick, of Drury Lane, the engagement of his pupil, Miss Brent, but, not receiving consideration, he went into what proved an anti-Garrick combine which worked successfully for a long time.

Garrick, whose domination of the stage in serious drama was directly rivaled by the run of such a ballad burlesque, was apparently disgruntled by the great popularity of *The Beggar's Opera.* Wyndham quotes the following lines on Nancy Dawson, who was with the Covent Garden company, and in satire of the manager:[16]

> See how the op'ra takes a run,
> Exceeding *Hamlet, Lear* or Lun,
> Tho' in it there would be no fun,
> Was't not for Nancy Dawson.
>
> Tho' Beard and Brent charm every night,
> And female Peachum's justly right,
> And Filch and Lockit please the sight,
> 'Tis crowned by Nancy Dawson.

[13] *Memoirs of Macklin,* p. 59.
[14] *Memoirs,* IV, 166.
[15] *Memoirs of Macklin,* pp. 57-58.
[16] *Annals of C.G.,* I, 137-138.

See Little Davy strut and Puff,
'P—— on the op'ra and such stuff,
My house is never full enough,
A curse on Nancy Dawson!'

Tho' Garrick he has had his day,
And forc'd the town his laws t'obey,
Now Johnny Rich is come in play,
With help of Nancy Dawson.

It was a coincidence that when Garrick, on his visit to Portsmouth in 1759, requested Wilkinson to get a play put on for him, on Friday, July 27, *The Beggar's Opera* was selected by the actor-manager, White. The latter, who was then playing Macheath, "fixed on the Beggar's Opera, saying 'Mr. Ga—ick cannot, I think be displeased with my Macheath, though I want no favour from Mr. G——k.' "[17] Moody was given the honor of acting Lockit before Garrick, a performance which was, indeed, to his advantage, for the London manager was so pleased with him that Moody was engaged next morning for the ensuing season at Drury Lane.[18]

An incident of the night's entertainment was that Garrick and his party did not come in till about the middle of the second act of *The Beggar's Opera,* when the Macheath was fuming because he had played so much with Garrick absent. An immense crowd was gathered, mainly to see the famous actor and his lady.

1760. Both Covent Garden and Drury Lane theatres opened the new seasons of 1760 and 1761 with *The Beggar's Opera,* as the most profitable piece to give to an audience. Garrick was compelled to keep offering the play to check the tide toward Covent Garden. Mrs. Vincent made her first appearance as Polly on September 23, 1760, in direct rivalry with Miss Brent at the other house. She is said to have met with considerable success. Churchill praises her as follows:

Lo! Vincent comes—with simple grace array'd,
She laughs at paltry arts, and scorns parade.
Nature through her is by reflection shown,
Whilst Gay once more knows Polly for his own.

After attacking Italian music, Churchill testifies how

[17] That is, did not want to appear anxious for a bid to D.L.?
[18] See Wilkinson's *Memoirs,* II, 108 ff.

To Britons far more noble pleasures spring,
In native notes whilst Beard and Vincent sing.

In this couplet the poet exalts two artists playing at rival houses, but both appearing in the beloved English opera of Gay.

Goldsmith thus wrote of the popular Polly of Drury Lane:[19]

When Vincent, in *Polly,* so lovely appeared
So innocent, sweet, and serene,
Nor Newgate, nor hanging, nor fetters I fear'd;
Her presence gave joy to the scene:

Ah! who for so beauteous a charmer, thought I
His freedom of life would not barter;
Whose pride is so great, but for Polly would sigh,
Although she's a Thief-Taker's daughter.

The rivalry to Garrick continued. Though for a time both houses were crowded, by 1762 the Drury Lane manager's patronage had dwindled far. Baker, in his *London Stage,*[20] says

the musical pieces at Covent Garden, such as the Beggar's Opera, and Love in a Village, proved so attractive that the nightly takings at Drury Lane fell to £30, £15, and even £5 a night. It was at this time that Garrick took his Continental trip. . . .

Genest quotes Davies[21] as saying

the profits of Drury Lane at the close of this season [1762-63] fell very short in their amount to those of the preceding years—this was owing to the musical pieces at Covent Garden and particularly to Miss Brent, who came out in Polly —in vain did Garrick oppose his Ranger and Benedick, his Hamlet and Lear to Polly Peachum—the public was this season allured by nothing, but the power of sound and sing-song, Shakespeare and Garrick were obliged to quit the field to Beard and Brent.

Genest corrects Davies' mistake here as to the appearance of Miss Brent as Polly, which was on October 10, 1759.

1761. A private performance of *The Beggar's Opera,* quite a fashionable thing in those days, was given in 1761 at Carton, the seat of the Duke of Leinster, in County Kildare, Ireland. On this occasion not only several of the nobility took part, but the Rev. Dean Marlay,

[19] Letter LXXIX in *Public Ledger,* Oct. 21, 1760.
[20] One vol. ed., p. 76.
[21] V, 24-25.

later Lord Bishop of Clonfert, spoke the occasional prologue, which he had written, and acted the character of Lockit. Other players were: Morris, Macheath; Lord Claremont, Peachum; Lady Louisa Conolly, Lucy; Countess of Kildare, Mrs. Peachum; Mrs. Martin, Polly. The prologue begins:

> Our Play, to-night, Wants novelty, 'tis true:
> That to atone, our Actors all are new.

It takes up the various characters, telling how they will be acted. Finally, it says:

> . . . when this busy, mimic scene is o'er,
> All shall resume the worth they had before;
> Locket himself his knavery shall resign,
> And lose the gaoler in the dull divine.[22]

1762. A full bill was presented at Drury Lane on April 15, 1762. The *London Chronicle* announced two pieces besides *The Beggar's Opera,—The Farmer's Return from London,* and *Polly Honeycombe,* displaying thus an interesting connection of two similarly named characters. In Edinburgh, it is worth noticing, *The Beggar's Opera* was played for the benefit of Digges, as Macheath, on May 29, closing the spring season; and it was used by the same actor when the theatre opened in the autumn.

1763. Mossop invited Miss Catley to Dublin in 1763, "where she arrived late in Dec.," says Genest, "and made her 1st appearance in Polly Peachum—she pleased beyond expression, and even in the Christmas holidays, the most unfashionable part of the season, the houses were crowded every night—her Polly was often repeated."[23] Wilkinson says that "Miss Catley, who then occasioned much conversation and fashion, gave the old Beggar's Opera a new run, and allured several audiences."[24]

1764. During the next season (1764-65) at Smock Alley, according to Genest,

> Miss Catley's voice and whimsical style of singing took the lead and drew crowded houses—after she had played Polly several times, in order to oppose

[22] From Whyte's *Collection of Poems,* pp. 45-46.

[23] X, 473.

[24] *Memoirs,* III, 194. Almost the same words are found in Kirkman's *Memoirs of Macklin,* I, 460.

a new and unexpected manoeuvre of the other theatre,[25] she acted Macheath . . . this had the desired effect.[26]

Hitchcock says Catley in Macheath excited still higher curiosity, "and the Beggar's Opera proved another source of dispute and contention, at Smock-alley."[27] He continues:[28]

We may judge of the strength of the musical pieces this season, under Mr. Mossop, when we find the Beggar's Opera exhibited eleven nights, Love in a Village sixteen, Artaxerxes fourteen; besides the Maid of the Mill, Comus, the Jovial Crew, and the Italian Burlettas.

Hitchcock also says that Smock Alley opened the season of 1764, on October 15, with *Richard and Scapin,* but that "as their hopes rested chiefly on musical performances, the Beggar's Opera, with new accompaniments, by Signior Giordani, was next brought forward, which, with Love in a Village, and the new Burletta, were performed alternately, six or seven nights each."[29]

At this time, when, as Genest says,

the rage was . . . so great, that it was highly expedient to endeavour to stem the torrent Barry, conscious that his musical performers were not equal to those of Smock Alley where Miss Catley was holding forth in her sensational run boldly announced himself for Captain Macheath: Polly = Mrs. Dancer: Lucy = Mrs. Abington: —— the novelty of the attempt excited curiosity, and answered his most sanguine expectations. . . . Certain it is, that tho' his vocal abilities could not enable him to compass the common tunes of this well known piece, yet his figure, manner, and acting made ample amends, and he really was a fine gay bold-faced gentleman of the road—Mrs. Dancer gave Polly a delicacy, pathos and interest which few professed singers have ever been able to give the part—and Mrs. Abington's Lucy was ever esteemed capital.[30]

Hitchcock says the first night brought £160, the second £125, the third £50, the fourth £120, and the fifth £97, and that the piece was afterwards performed several times with varied success. Once more direct rivalry over *The Beggar's Opera* seems to have given the play new life.

1765-66. The next season (1765-66) at Mossop's theatre was

[25] Barry's appearance as Macheath.
[26] IV, 482.
[27] *Irish Stage,* I, 135.
[28] *Ibid.,* I, 139.
[29] *Ibid.,* I, 132.
[30] X, 483.

opened on October 21, with Catley as Macheath, which she gave up for the parts of Polly and Lucy at times during the year. Operas seem again to have gained the lead, with *The Beggar's Opera* ahead of the rest. Dublin, in these years, took almost original interest in the piece which had delighted so many Irish audiences in 1728.

At Drury Lane, on September 14, 1765, *The Beggar's Opera* was performed with an occasional prologue by King.

Dibdin tells of some trouble in Edinburgh during the season of 1765-66:

> The public, after putting up with several cases of discreditable performances, at length took exception to the omission of a hornpipe, which was advertised to be danced between the acts of the Beggar's Opera.[31]

It may be true that the people at times were as fond of the trimmings as of the opera itself. The request for the hornpipe was complied with, but at the performance there was an interruption regarding the matter before the play was allowed to proceed. The piece was finished, but when the manager, Beat, refused to apologize in person the audience wrecked the theatre.

1766. There was an occasional prologue to *The Beggar's Opera* on December 20, 1766, at Covent Garden. The *Whitehall Evening Post*, for December 23, says it was "well suited to the purpose and well spoken by Mr. Ross." The performance was given for the benefit of the new theatrical fund for "decayed actors" of Covent Garden. According to the same paper, "The principal parts are well performed, but Mr. Beard in Macheath, will not bear a comparison with Mr. Vernon at the other house."

The preface to a two-act farce by Thomas Sadler, *The Merry Miller*, printed in 1766, contains a significant note. The author apologizes for this first attempt at anything in a dramatic way, written while he was engaged at his regular trade:

> Being solicited by some neighbours and friends to play the part of Macheath, in the Beggar's Opera, for their divertion, gave birth to the following Farce. . . . The Author having compos'd a new song to be sung in the character of Ben Budge, at the beginning of the 2nd Act in the Beggar's Opera, he hath presumed to give it along with the rest of his pieces, for the Amusement of his Readers.

[31] *Annals Edinburgh Stage*, p. 136.

Then follows, between the Advertisement and the Dramatis Personae, "A New Song. Sung in the character of Ben Budge," etc. It is a drinking song, beginning, "Fill the bowl to the brim, hand the glasses around." It closes, "For cash we must have, cock your pistols, fire, fire [They range in order their pistols]."

1767. It is not generally known that the pianoforte was first introduced to an English audience between the acts of *The Beggar's Opera*. It may not have been merely a coincidence that Gay's piece was selected for this special occasion, on May 16, 1767. Wyndham quotes from the playbill of the day. After Act I "Miss Brickler will sing a favourite song from Judith, accompanied by Mr. Dibdin, on a new instrument called Piano Forte."[32]

A letter "to the Theatrical Observer," signed "Old English" and printed in the *Whitehall Evening Post* for September 19, 1767, regarding the performance of *The Beggar's Opera* on September 16, throws a good deal of light on the manner of playing the piece at this period, and gives a part of the public opinion concerning it:

> Undoubtedly the exhibition at Drury Lane . . . was rather weak than otherwise; for although the Beggar's Opera cannot but be allowed by all who are in the least conversant with the dramatic writing to be a most masterly and great composition, yet the length of time it hath been wrote, and the frequency of its having been acted, not only in London, Dublin, Edinburgh, but in every capital, town and village in the three Kingdoms, hath taken off the keeness of appetite with which people used to flock formerly to see that piece, in preference almost to any other; but at present, nothing except a new Macheath, or Polly, or a new method of warbling out and Italianizing the songs, can any longer excite the curiosity of the public to the representation of the Beggar's Opera, and these stratagems, especially the last, have been practised with some success ever since our poor country people have taken it into their heads to relish everything foreign and ridiculous, slight their home manufactories, and think it absurd to pay for anything they understand.—To do Mr. Vernon justice, he acted Macheath very well; Mrs. Arne and Mrs. Abington went through their parts with spirit and applause; but I must beg all the fine singers' pardons when I declare that I am no friend to the present manner of performing the Beggar's Opera, and that (to please me) I have seen it some years ago infinitely better done, and much nearer to the author's design I am perfectly assured than I did on Wednesday last.

1769. After Miss Rose's benefit in *The Beggar's Opera* on August 29, 1769, at the Haymarket, a notice appeared in the *Middlesex Jour-*

[32] *Annals of C.G.*, I, 161. See also Rimbault's *Hist. of Pianoforte*, pp. 133 and 139, and Grove's *Dict. of Music*, on Pianoforte.

nal for August 31, in which she thanked the public "for the great honour they did her on their appearance at her benefit." This is probably proof of a big crowd. The most interesting thing, however, is her apology for not giving the new prologue and epilogue as advertised. The nature of these pieces is unknown. On October 11, at Drury Lane, the joint program of *The Beggar's Opera* and *Queen Mab* was concluded with a masquerade.

1770. In 1770 *The Beggar's Opera* was adapted for the German stage, and acted in Hamburg, if we may follow the statement of the translator, E. E. Buschmann, that his version, "eine kopie der berühmten Bettlersoper," was published "zum Behuf des Hamburgischen Theaters." He says, "Noch bis auf den heutigen Tag wird sie [The Beggar's Opera] in London mit Vergnügen gesehen." That is probably the reason why he undertook, at this late time, to work it over for a German audience. The piece was presented under the name of *Die Strassenraüber.*

1771. Edinburgh was still going to see *The Beggar's Opera* in 1771, and the critics found fresh material for comment. The *Whitehall Evening Post* for Tuesday, April 16, under "Momus in Edinburgh," has a report of the performance of February 14, with *The Lying Valet.* The reviewer says: "Mr. Robson, who played Captain Macheath, sings very prettily; but it must be observed, that he is not fitted for that part." After discussing the real character of the hero highwayman the writer says:

> We have had in this place a most admirable Macheath—Mr. Digges. We never saw Mr. Walker; but we are persuaded that he could hardly be more capital in the part than Digges.

The Beggar's Opera, as played on Monday, October 20, 1771, at Covent Garden, was reviewed in the *Whitehall Evening Post* for October 21, under "Theatrical Intelligence." Just how long the additional scene referred to had been in use is uncertain.

> The additions last night appeared less heavy, from their being shortened and compressed; they nevertheless are still, and still will remain, obviously the composition of a very different pen from that of Gay. Were they, however, even more dull, surely the prospect of so beautiful a scene as that of Woolrich Reach, painted by Mr. Richards, makes ample amends to the spectators for restraining their risibility and wearing a grave face for a few minutes. The admirers of Gay, at least, ought not to be offended, as in compliance with the requisition of

some of the audience of Friday, the Managers have restored the scene between Mrs. Trapes, Peachum, and Lockit. The Opera, therefore, is now played complete as it was written, exclusive of the additional scene, to make room for which the dance, and Macheath's triumphant song of, "Thus I stand like a Turk, with my doxies around" are only omitted.

In compliance with the news-paper Critics, the Managers have altered Macheath's dress, and made him appear in the same coat in the third act, as in the two former. Let them remember, this contradicts Gay's meaning expressed in two different parts of the Opera. —— Does Macheath *look as fine as a Lord* in a plain, unlaced regimental frock?

1773. The year 1773 saw the new morality fright about *The Beggar's Opera.*[33] It is a matter of history, however, that Justice Fielding's attempts at prohibition did no harm to the piece, and that it was played subsequently just as much as usual. It had closed the season at Drury Lane on June 2 of this year, and the next spring, in 1774, it was the last play, on May 26, at Covent Garden.

1774. The music from *The Beggar's Opera* was probably often used to furnish incidental numbers for other plays. This was true in 1774, in connection with a new comedy, *The Man of Business.* The *Whitehall Evening Post* for February 1 said, "The Music preceding the Play was from the Beggar's Opera, beginning with the Tune of, 'The Charge is prepared,' and had a very good effect." This shows a new function of the opera in helping, by means of its favorite strains, a new piece into the favor of the public.

On September 6, 1774, at the Haymarket, there was a new occasional epilogue to *The Beggar's Opera.* The excuse for one at this time was the departure of the manager, Colman. Bannister had his benefit on this night.

1777. An alteration of *The Beggar's Opera,* by Captain Thompson,[34] was brought on the stage at Covent Garden on October 17, 1777. The greatest change seems to have been in the ending of the piece, where, according to the *Biographia Dramatica,*

Macheath after trial is sentenced to work on the Thames. Here he is visited by Polly and Lucy; acknowledges the lenity of his sentence, and resolves to become a virtuous member of the community. The alteration, however, was soon laid aside. Not printed.

Genest tells us that "Oulton says that Macheath was sentenced to

[33] For a discussion of this matter see Chapter XXI.

[34] *Biog. Dram.*

heave ballast on the river for 3 years—this stupid alteration was performed about 19 times."[35] The performances after October 17 seem to have been given, for some reason, on alternate nights.

During 1777, according to Parke, Mrs. Farrell, a pupil of Dr. Arne recently acquired by the Covent Garden company, "made her first appearance . . . in the character of Captain Macheath in 'The Beggar's Opera,' in which she introduced Dr. Arne's celebrated song, composed for the occasion, 'A Hunting we will go.' "[36] Parke cites her as one more actress who sought the help of Macheath in attracting attention which she could never have received in a woman's part.

To keep up with the Covent Garden run of *The Beggar's Opera* during October and November, 1777, Drury Lane seems to have started out with the same piece, on November 8, Saturday night. Of the acting and dressing of the play on this occasion the *Whitehall Evening Post*, for Tuesday, November 11, has much to say, some of the comments being instructive:

> In the song in the third Act, beginning —— "The charge is prepared" . . . he[37] captivated every auditor, and drew down a long and loud plaudit and encore from all parts of the theatre. . . . Considered in Macheath, as an actor, Mr. Webster . . . is not by any means equal to Vernon. . . . Added to this, he dresses the part out of all line of dramatic propriety, and is the veriest fop of a Macheath we ever saw.

After describing Webster's inappropriate costume for the part, the writer goes on:

> If Mr. Webster be so weak as to wish to make Macheath a finished macoroni, surely the managers are not pardonable for thus sacrificing dramatic propriety at the shrine of youthful vanity. Gay, as we have (in opposition to the shameful invasions of characteristic appearance, practiced *de die in diem*, at each theatre) repeatedly remarked, has absolutely drawn the plan of his wardrobe, and in the most positive terms described the proper cloaths for Macheath. As Mr. Webster dresses the character at Drury Lane he really appears less manly than his female competitors at that of Covent Garden.

The critic compliments the Polly, Mrs. Baddeley, but expresses his disappointment in Mrs. Wrighten as Lucy:

> She ran into the opposite extreme to that adopted at the other Theatre. Lucy is now played in high tragedy at Covent Garden, in low Comedy at Drury

[35] VI, 15.

[36] *Musical Memoirs*, Vol. I.

[37] Webster—apparently his first appearance as Macheath at D.L.

Lane. Whether the laughing or crying Lucy may be most liked, we know not, but we scruple not to pronounce them both palpably wrong.

Another statement of the writer suggests that the running in of extra words and lines by the individual actors may have become a common practice: "Mr. Parsons was a complete blackguard in Filch, and made several additions so perfectly in the stile of the *Gemmen* of *St.* Giles's, that we have not a doubt but that parish had the honour of his education."

Finally the reviewer turns

to the boasted alteration of this celebrated Opera, which is no more than this: When Macheath goes off to execution, the Player and Beggar come forward to settle the poetical justice of his character. The latter is for hanging him; but the other objects to that as inconsistent with the rules of a Comic Opera; it is then settled between them, that Macheath shall obtain the Royal mercy, which, they hope, so far from encouraging vice, it will cause a virtuous reformation on the principles of gratitude. After this, and some cant about morals, which we did not very well hear, Macheath as usual re-enters; (not at all like a man either effected by gratitude or penitence) sings his song of "Thus I stand like a Turk, with his doxies around," takes his dance, makes his bow, and then the Piece Concludes.

How far so wise an alteration has improved the moral of this Piece, may be collected from the sense of the Audience, nine tenths of whom did not perceive there was any alteration at all; the sensible part of those that did, laughed at it as one of the most puerile that ever disgraced a Tyro in the dramatic art. —— Sorry are we to add, after what Truth has extorted from us, that this alteration is the production of no less a character than Mr. Garrick, who, not content with the powers of an imitative genius, and having *acted* himself into *fame,* is now in the decline of life, *scribbling himself out of it.*

This suggestion of Garrick in the new rôle of meddling with the text of *The Beggar's Opera* is something new. It is probable that the Drury Lane version was prepared to keep pace with the changes at Covent Garden; for if ever any piece became a fashion, with varying styles, it was surely *The Beggar's Opera.* What surprises us here is that Garrick, who in 1759 was perhaps bored by the very name of the play, and at least made poorer by it, should handle it now as a profitable piece of stock. As to the music to accompany the revised version now presented, the critic says, "The airs of the opera stand nearly as they did before; but there are some pleasing alterations in the symphonies, which are said to be the production of Mr. Linley."

1778. The idea that *The Beggar's Opera* was often used for the

sake of an actress is again indicated by the performance of June 8, 1778, at the Haymarket. The play was presented "in order to introduce Miss Harper (the celebrated Rosetta) in the character of Polly," as the *Whitehall Evening Post* expresses it. Some of the comments of this paper for June 9 are significant:

> She spoke the language of Gay with that sensibility which is the effect of a good judgment, and sung the airs with great simplicity and pathos. We cannot, however, but think the new accompaniment to the air "When my Hero in Court does appear,"[38] is not an improvement: long experience proves it is difficult to alter the airs of this Opera for the better, as the dialogue.

On the same occasion the *St. James's Chronicle* for June 9 said:

> Last night the Beggar's Opera was performed, and Miss Harper appeared in the Part of Polly. The Idea we had conceived of the good Sense, Judgement and Taste, of this Lady, was fully confirmed; for she spoke her part with Truth and Feeling, and sung the airs in a manner which should put operatical Affectation to the Blush.
>
> Mrs. Hitchcock's Lucy, Mr. Bannister's Macheath, Mr. Aickin's Peachum, &c., were in general characteristic and well supported. The whole opera is well got up, and is presented by the manager as Gay left it, and not mutilated to the present Taste of sentimental Hypocrisy and profligate Decorum.

1779. What is certainly a reference to the vogue of *The Beggar's Opera* as late as 1779 is found in an article in the *St. James's Chronicle,* March 13, under "The Theatre":

> Mr. Sheridan is a popular writer; but in the Scales of Criticism, if Popularity were a Circumstance of Weight, Gay would rival Milton, and Whitefield be preferred to Xenophon.

1781. Crowds were drawn to the Haymarket in 1781 when Colman reversed the characters of *The Beggar's Opera* and set all London running to see it in its newest form. The *St. James's Chronicle* for August 9 tells, better than anything else, the story of the initial performance of August 8:[39]

> Laughter has ever been one of the main Props of this Theatre, from the Days of Fielding and Foote to those of Colman—a Triumvirate of comic writers, who have successively and successfully, been the Conductors of the Entertainments exhibited on the North side of the Hay-Market. Never was Laughter more powerfully excited within the Walls of a Play House, than by the topsy-

[38] A slight misquotation, or else a new acting version of the line.
[39] The *Biog. Dram.* has Aug. 7.

turvy Representation of the Beggar's Opera, the Ladies characters being all acted by men, and the men represented by Ladies. Independently of the Entertainment, arising from so ludicrous an Inversion, we never saw Gay's Purpose of Ridicule better effected, or the characters more ably exhibited. Mrs. Cargill's Macheath was equal, if not superior, in Excellence, to that of any masculine representation of the character; and Mr. Bannister displayed so much sensibility in Polly, that at length, in Spite of his Figure, it almost grew affecting, and ceased to be ridiculous. The Powers of the other Performers were displayed with equal skill and success. We would advise, however, some Curtailments, which indeed we think would be an Improvement, even in a regular Representation of the Opera!

Burlesque being always hazardous, and theatrical burlesque particularly liable to Danger, this Undertaking was introduced by an occasional Prelude, as the Bills stiled it Preludio, in 3 scenes of dialogue, admirably calculated to prejudice the Audience in Favour of the Travestie that was to follow. The scene of the Orange Coffee-House, and that at the Theatre, abound with Pleasantry. The Parody on the Ballet of Medea and Jason is also a happy Effect of Pantomimical Mummery.

The Whole was exhibited, amidst continued Peals of Laughter and Applause, to the most crowded and brilliant Audience that ever filled the Theatre, and seems to bid fair to continue its attraction.

The piece ran for a good number of nights this season, and was no doubt the chief novelty of 1781. The production was so boldly absurd that it brought large receipts. Its success, however, was not necessarily a sign the old comedy with songs was gradually wearing out, and needed the reversal as a proper tonic. If so, the time for such a decline could be expected; not many other plays of the period of 1728 had survived till 1781. The *St. James's Chronicle,* Tuesday, September 18, in reporting the close of the Haymarket Theatre for the season, says: "Saturday evening Mr. Colman closed the Business of the Theatre[40] with that good Humour and Applause which have attended the execution of it all during the Season." This has direct reference, of course, to the long run of the newly dressed opera, as well as to the other plays it had dragged into summer popularity. The same novelty, moreover, was to be revived the next season, with pronounced success.

The nature of the *Preludio,* in three scenes of dialogue, used on this occasion with "a favourite Pasticcio called the Beggar's Opera," is suggested by Genest's list of characters, and rather clearly described in the *Biographia Dramatica.* Genest gives these parts:

[40] With *The Spanish Barber,* not *The Beggar's Opera.*

Prompter, Bannister, Jr.; Townly, Stanton; Beggar, Blisset; Signor Scrapelli, Delpini. The *Biographia Dramatica* says the first scene showed Townly and the Beggar discussing the absurdity of opera and the consequent reversal of Gay's piece to increase that effect. The scene was closed with the account given by the Beggar "of a party of Italian chiefs having assembled at a neighbouring coffeehouse to condemn the performance." The second scene was in such a coffeehouse. The third scene consisted partly of comedy over the "opposition" of sexes, and of take-offs on Italian opera. The *Biographia Dramatica* concludes its description with the statement that this *Preludio,* "considered as a few light scenes, written merely as a sort of 'prose prologue' to the 'travestie' of 'characters' in the Opera, was very well handled, neatly pointed, and highly laughable."

Not all the playgoers sympathized with the hash Colman had made out of *The Beggar's Opera.* O'Keeffe quotes a letter of Friday, September 19, 1781, which he had received from Dr. Samuel Arnold, who was setting songs to music for O'Keeffe's *The Banditti, or Love's Labyrinth.* A portion of it reads:

> Your Opera is very strongly cast. Catley will certainly be of use; although I find she has not succeeded according to expectation in Macheath.—Apropos, I think they are playing the fool with the Beggar's Opera.[41]

Ryan, writing in 1825, under the heading "The Beggar's Opera Travestied," shows his disgust at such a trick of the theatrical craft:

> In the year 1780,[42] Mr. Colman had recourse to a most whimsical and indecent mode of attracting visitors to this theatre in the Hay-market, viz. by travestying "the Beggar's Opera," that is, by putting all the female performers in the male parts and *vice versa.*[43]

Colman was looking for novelty and had no scruples about the matter. Perhaps he did not take *The Beggar's Opera* so seriously as some of his patrons.

After the Haymarket theatre closed, Mrs. Cargill went over to Drury Lane, for the fall season, where she kept to her popular male part, while the other reversions were abandoned. The people seemed ready to see the play in fairly standard form, even if they were to

[41] *Recollections,* II, 16.
[42] Mistake for 1781. Pearce (*Polly Peachum,* p. 329) also has 1780.
[43] *Table Talk,* I, 75.

support a stranger innovation than ever in the same month. Linley's music was used again, and dancing was introduced after Act II, and, by way of a hornpipe, in Act III.

The night after Drury Lane opened, Covent Garden theatre offered the town a novelty worthy of Colman's ingenuity (or depravity) in appealing to the public taste. The *St. James's Chronicle,* for Thursday, October 18, 1781, gives a choice bit of ridicule of the manager's new scheme. Allusion to the performance of *The Beggar's Opera* before the reversions of 1781 is also to be inferred.

Tuesday Evening [October 16] The Beggar's Opera was performed wholly by Women;[44] at the Head of whom was Miss Catley in the Part of Captain Macheath.

Among the profound and advantageous Plans of the present Administration, one is said to be, to assign proper Employments to the different Sexes, so as to exert on great Occasions the whole Force of the Community. Regulating Captains have it in Commission to clear our Shops of Men-Milleners, Haberdashers, Perfurmers, Hairdressers, &c for the Navy; and it has been some Time in Contemplation to assign the Conquest of America, and the Plunder of East-India Nabobs, to those Heroes of the Buskin, who have been trained on our Theatre, at least in the Affectation of Valour, and in the prompt Execution of the Orders of their Masters. Great Hopes are conceived from this Project; and we must own, it appears to us the most feasible of any Thing which has been lately conceived. As Mr. Colman has led the Way for some Time in Theatrical Measures, we are to suppose (for we have not positive Authority to say) that he was ordered by Ministry to try the Experiment of substituting Women for Men. It answered —— But the little manager, attending a little to his own Interest (as what manager does not) he put the Men into the Women's parts and turned the whole business into Ridicule. The Winter Managers seem to be determined literally to pursue the plan; but not with so much Advantage to them selves. No female Polly will ever be so popular as Bannister; and if he is to be sent against Washington, Invalids may be employed with tolerable Success. It is no Wonder that Catley should be an Improvement on Mrs. Cargill; for whatever the latter has that is audacious, indecent, and meretricious in her Manner, she copyed originally from the former. As it is a Principle of Political Economy, that the Business of a Monarchy should be done without Virtue, or with the least possible Quantity of it, we request all loyal and good Guardians, Parents, Tutors, School-Masters, and School-Mistresses, to bring their Wards, Scholars, and Children (Girls in particular) to the Beggar's Opera, when it is acted by Women.

It was the great popularity and sensation of *The Beggar's Opera* in

[44] This production was called *The Ladies' Opera,* a title that harks back to the short piece written in 1728.

its new forms in this year that supported the publication of at least three editions of the *Miniature Pictures* of 1781. The title reads: "Miniature Pictures. *Written Originally* by Mr. Gay, Author of The Beggar's Opera, &c, &c. Newly adapted to The most Fashionable and Public Characters, of Both Sexes, Now Living; Whether in The Church, The Senate, Westminster-Hall, The Court, The Navy, The Army, The City, or The Theatres. Containing above Six Hundred Portraits; All of which are acknowledged Striking Likenesses." Gay's title-page from Martial follows. The book is dedicated to Richard Brinsley Sheridan by "An Admirer of Gay and Sheridan." Then come the "Miniature Pictures, drawn by the celebrated *Mr. Gay,* that *Masterly Painter* of the *Human Heart.*" The work is supposedly based on a wager by a gentleman who "ventured to assert, that he would produce *more* than *double* the *number* of *well-known Characters* from *One Modern Play,* than all those which have been *hitherto* published from the works of the immortal Avon Bard." *Twelfth Night* was selected for the competition, and of course the examiner found more "sentences from *The Beggar's Opera* which anywise marked a *Character.*" The compiler adds, "In such a *multiplicity* of Characters, from a *three-act piece,* it cannot be expected that all of them can be equally striking, although they may be found, perhaps, in the circle of friends of each, equally apt, and expressive of *a miniature resemblance.*" No doubt many of the phrases fitted well and furnished a good deal of contemporary attraction.

1785. In 1785 *The Beggar's Opera* was brought to the New Theatre at Hammersmith, a playhouse of which very little trace remains, but which offered the Newgate comedy on June 10, and possibly for several times after, with "Performers carefully selected from various Theatres-Royal." Polly was acted by Miss Cranford, Macheath by Wright.

1787. Another private performance took place in 1787, on December 17, at Dromana, County Waterford, Ireland. There was a cast of seven in *The Beggar's Opera* "contracted." Polly was played by Mrs. Musgrave and Macheath by Trevor Ashe. The part of Filch was taken by Sir John Carden.[45]

1789. In April, 1789, Michael Kelly played Macheath for the first time, for his benefit, with Mrs. Crouch as Polly, and Mrs. Charles

[45] From intro. to *Private Theatre of Kilkenny.*

Kemble (then Miss De Camp) as Lucy. His gossip about the part he took is fairly illustrative of the general attitude of most of the men, and often some of the women, of his profession. "To play Macheath," he says, "was the height of my ambition: I took all the pains I could, and no young man had greater pains taken with him."[46] He played in the piece for a number of nights.

1790. Kelly, assisted by Mrs. Crouch, is found performing *The Beggar's Opera* in August, 1790, at Margate, for the benefit of an invalid girl there. "Every place was taken and the whole pit, one row excepted, was railed into the boxes."[47] Johnstone, an actor friend of Kelly, just returned from Paris, took the part of Mat of the Mint, in which "he introduced a song in the thieves' scene at the table."

The following strange account of *The Beggar's Opera* in 1790 is related by Cooke:

> Nor age, nor time, have been able to stale the character of this celebrated Opera! Every species of performers have attempted it, from the Theatres Royal to Barns and Puppet-shows. Not longer ago than the year 1790, it was played at Barnstaple in Devonshire, when Macheath had but *one eye;* Polly but *one arm;* the songs supported in the orchestra by a man who whistled to the tunes, whilst the Manager could not read.[48]

Gay's birthplace was not the most appropriate spot in England for such butchering of the first ballad opera.

1791. John Ireland says that *The Beggar's Opera* "in the year 1791, retains its primitive attractions, and is become, what the Drury-lane diary styles a *stock play.*"[49]

1792. The opera was partly reversed again in 1791 (August 19) at the Haymarket, with Bannister as Polly. It was wholly reversed the next year, 1792, when Johnstone had his benefit on August 15 at the Haymarket. Of this performance the *Thespian Magazine* remarks that it was "a wretched way of forcing a laugh." Later on, in a longer account, it tells how

> in the summer season of 1792, Mr. Johnstone for his benefit reversed the characters of the Beggar's Opera by way of procuring an overflow to the better spirits of the actor. Old Bannister on this occasion was allotted to the tender

[46] *Reminiscences,* p. 202.
[47] *Ibid.,* pp. 205-206.
[48] *Memoirs of Macklin,* p. 62.
[49] *Hogarth Illustrated,* II, 342 ff.

part of Polly, and Johnstone to Lucy, and the redoubted Captain was undertaken by our heroine.[50]

The writer is not sympathetic toward the change, for he adds, "Highly as we disapprove of so absurd, not to say, indelicate transformation, we shall pass over the impropriety, and confine ourselves to Miss De Camp's performance of Macheath." Of this actress's representation of that character the critic says that "there has been nothing near it by any *Macheath* before or since, during the recollection of the writer of this article." He gives the part credit for her advancement: "Thus introduced it is not surprising that her progress in the good opinion of the Town, was rapid, and meritorious."[51]

In the same year, on June 2, after the Covent Garden season had closed, *The Beggar's Opera* was put on at a special performance for the benefit of the theatrical fund.

The late revivals in London seem generally to have been accompanied by secondary runs in other cities, including Dublin and Edinburgh. The *Thespian Magazine,* telling of Dublin theatricals for that season, 1792-93, says, "Love in a Village, and the Beggar's Opera have been likewise got up here, Mrs. Billington and Mrs. Mountain of course the heroines of both pieces."[52] The article comments on the acting, especially with regard to the humor of Moss as Peachum, indicating that the play was received with much favor at that time. *The Beggar's Opera* was offered in Edinburgh, under Kemble's management, on January 19, 1792. On that occasion, says Dibdin (following the *Courant*), "the House was lighted with wax, a practice which, up to that period, had only been indulged in on benefit nights."[53]

1793. Amateurs played Gay's piece in Dublin, at Fishamble Street Theatre, on March 6, 1793, the opening night. Molloy says they were "a distinguished company of amateurs," performing

much to the satisfaction of themselves and their friends. This enterprise proved so satisfactory that in the following year Jones obtained permission from the Government to open a theatre in which for the space of seven years he might act "all interludes, tragedies, comedies, preludes, operas, burlettas, plays, farces,

[50] Miss De Camp.
[51] II, 325 (1793).
[52] January, 1793, p. 178.
[53] *Annals Edinburgh Stage,* p. 216.

pantomimes of whatever nature soever, decent and becoming, and not profane and obnoxious."[54]

The last statement reminds us that by some people *The Beggar's Opera* may have been considered indecent, unbecoming, profane, and obnoxious. At any rate, we hear from Michael Kelly of an interesting attempt to restore the piece to good standing:

> At this period [1793] the Beggar's Opera was prohibited by the Irish government from being acted, which of course made the public more eager to see it. It was suggested that if I could make interest to get permission to have it acted for my benefit, it would draw a great house. I, therefore, waited on my good friend, Mrs. Jefferies, sister to Lord Clare, the Lord Chancellor, to entreat her to use her influence with his Lordship to get me permission to have it acted. She pleaded my cause with great zeal, got a verdict in my favour, and the performance of it brought me an overflowing house.
>
> The managers ought to have been well pleased that I took this measure and carried it; for the piece, ever since that time, has kept its station on the Dublin stage.[55]

Concerning the performance of October 12, 1793, at Covent Garden, the *Thespian Magazine* says: "Gay's admirable satire continues its attraction; the novelty of the evening was Miss Poole in Polly." The critic praises Incledon as "undoubtedly the best Macheath of the present day," but he indulges in the peculiar criticism of Munden, who played Peachum, dressing the character from Hogarth's print, "that he should recollect, that though such a wig, hat, sword, etc., were worn at *that* time, they are highly improper now." He adds that "Mrs. Martyr's Lucy was lively, and divested of vulgarity," as if to say the part was not always so acted.[56]

1799. The merit of *The Beggar's Opera* was still recognized in 1799, even if its success on the stage was somewhat behindhand. Dutton, writing in the *Dramatic Censor*[57] about a performance of December 27, at Drury Lane, lays the blame partly on those who acted it:

> Independent of a variety of collateral causes, connected with the lapse of time, which have nearly abrogated the interest of this once popular play, we cannot help attributing the bad houses it now draws, to the dull, spiritless and insipid

[54] *Irish Stage*, II, 247-248.
[55] *Reminiscences*, p. 242.
[56] II, 309 (1793).
[57] I, 16 ff. (1800).

manner, in which Captain Mackheath, the principal character in the piece is performed by Mr. Kelly.

He discusses the proper qualities of Macheath, and then declares that

in vain will the spectator look for these characteristics in Mr. Kelly's performance. His manner evinces a total want of feeling and conception; it is uniformly dull and inanimate, conveying the idea of an automaton . . . the spirited performance of Miss De Camp, in the character of Lucy, (which may, with strict justice, be pronounced a chef-d'oeuvre of theatrical excellence) operates as a damning contrast to the imbecillity of her partner.

The truth is, that the rage for *sing-song,* and *gutteral,* as well as *manual,* dexterity, abstracted from sentiment, has so entirely bewitched the town, that sound and execution, both vocal and instrumental, may boast a complete triumph over sense, and moral propriety. That it is, that countenances Mr. Kelly in his caricature of Captain Mackheath: or, perhaps, we are guilty of a misnomer, in terming his performance a *caricature;* as, instead of overcharging the character, he renders it feeble, tame, and insignificant. Dramatic justice does not require that Mackheath should be an Italian singer; but that he should preserve the character of a man of gallantry, intrepidity, gaiety, and ease, is an indispensable requisite.

1800. Of the performances of *The Beggar's Opera* during 1800 (specifically that of June 10 at Drury Lane), Dutton, in his criticism for the *Dramatic Censor,* favors in general the production of the piece at Drury Lane, aside from the better Macheath of Incledon at Covent Garden: "In other respects, we give the preference, as to the manner of getting up this play, to Drury Lane."[58] Judging by the same writer's harsh dealing elsewhere with the opera at the latter playhouse, we may suppose that he chooses merely between two poor substitutes for the original.

[58] II, 259.

CHAPTER VIII

THE NINETEENTH CENTURY AND AFTER

THE nineteenth century found *The Beggar's Opera* actively engaged in preserving its reputation as a popular favorite. Though the number of performances gradually diminished, important single representations and notable revivals of some duration serve to link the later period with the lucky days when the Newgate comedy was in its prime.

1806. Genest records a performance at Covent Garden on October 8, 1806, writing "acted 10 times." Here was Miss Bolton's first appearance on any stage, in Polly. Her success seems to have been distinct, even though she was no great actress or singer. Like the early Pollies, too, she got a titled husband, Lord Thurlow, by her charms in the part of Peachum's daughter.

1807. Of the private performance at Kilkenny, Ireland, on October 16, 1807, a local newspaper said:[1]

> The Beggar's Opera, on Friday, introduced to our Audience a Gentleman [Ashe] long distinguished for his musical talents and comic powers, in the character of *Macheath;* the Songs were all given with very good effect, particularly "The Judges are met," and "The Medley," and his manner of acting it, especially in the parting admonition to the Gang, exhibited a just sense of the effect to be produced by the Mock-Heroic. *Filch* was excellent, and *Peachum* a performance of the richest humor.

1808. The standing of the opera in 1808 is indicated by this passage from Mrs. Inchbald's "Remarks" in her edition of that year:

> "The Beggar's Opera" . . . charmed every auditor, except those who were the objects of its satire. Anecdotes, almost incredible, are related of its popularity on its first coming forth; and yet, their truth can be easily conceived, when the present force of this excellent work is recollected. At this period, when English operas are no longer a novelty, and some very good ones have appeared, still, no entertainment of the kind, is allowed to hold an exact equality with this production.

[1] Issue of Oct. 17. From *Private Theatre of Kilkenny,* p. 36.

1809. A verse adaptation in 1809 furnishes another instance of the straining for novelty in the presentation of Gay's piece. Perhaps the writer could have justified his work by saying, "All this we must do, to comply with the Taste of the Town."[2] On June 15, at the Royal Circus, London, was produced J. C. Cross' "New Burletta, Melo Drama, in Three Parts, Founded on the subject, incidents, and diction, carefully compressed, of the Beggar's Opera."[3] In Act II Macheath is shown at a masquerade, with some of the women of the town. George Raymond tells us that the experiment was successful to the extent of fifty performances.[4] In 1810 the piece was used again at the Surrey Theatre.

In Eaton Stannard Barrett's "The Setting Sun . . . by Cervantes Hogg, Esq.," published in London in 1809, is found "A Musical Entertainment, being a parody on The Beggar's Opera, as lately performed with universal eclat, at the Theatre Royal Glyster Place."[5] This three-act piece is written after the manner of *The Beggar's Opera,* but the plot and characters are founded on Col. G. L. Wardle's exposé of the sale of army appointments by Mrs. M. A. Clarke, mistress of Frederick, Duke of York and Commander-in-chief. The parody contains twelve songs from the opera and four from *Polly,* and uses in rare cases a line or a phrase from the original text. Two characters, Moll Sharp and Moll Trapes, have suggestive names. The title at the top of the first page of text reads, "The New Beggar's Opera."

When the new Covent Garden theatre was opened on September 18, 1809, there were those who were looking for another *Beggar's Opera* to wake the popular dramatic muse. O'Keeffe prints some verses, written for the opening of the new playhouse, and published in the *Morning Herald,* one line of which tells how "A future Gay may whirl our Thespian car." A couplet in the same poem hints at the desirable popularity of *The Beggar's Opera,* now almost a hundred years old:

> In Covent Garden still shall bloom the bay,
> And Brents and Fentons warble on the spray.[6]

[2] Player's speech in *The Beggar's Opera.*

[3] Published in London, 1809.

[4] *Memoirs of Elliston,* p. 161.

[5] III, 75-125.

[6] *Recollections,* II, 425-426.

Even as late as that period, when a similar piece was not found, the old stand-by was hauled out again and made to do the work of a dozen contemporary plays.

The Beggar's Opera was mixed up, naturally enough, in the price wars of the theatres. It was used at the beginning of the stormy seasons of 1809-10 and 1810-11, apparently because the managers were more ready to risk the success of their faithful stock piece than the disaster of a new one. Thus it may have been intended as a conciliatory sop to restless patrons. Stockdale gives an account of the performance of September 19, 1809, the second night:

> The play was "The Beggar's Opera"; and, amidst the unremitting noises of catcalls, howling, whistling, and stamping of feet, not a word or note was heard. The performers were spared all exertions, and they shortened both play and farce, without the least observation on the part of the spectators, so as to conclude the whole before ten o'clock. The company, however, resumed their seats, after the fall of the curtain and the clamour continued, with unabated violence, to a very late hour.[7]

The opera does not seem to have been at all effective in defeating the purpose of the audience to break up any performance at that house. Oulton relates how an investigation committee, which had been appointed to examine the high prices of the theatre, reported that the alteration of admission had arisen solely from the impossibility of continuing public amusements on former terms.

> The theatre was accordingly re-opened with "The Beggar's Opera" and "Is he a Prince?", but the hostilities remained still unabated and the witticisms on the occasion displayed as much bitterness and poignancy as before.[8]

1810. The *Dramatic Censor*[9] tells of the opening of the next season at Covent Garden, on September 10. The pieces were *The Beggar's Opera* and *Raising the Wind,* presented under the new circumstances of lowered prices. There was still an attempt, however, to break up the performance, all during the evening. After the audience, which was a large one, had sung "God Save the King," at the call of the patrons, the opera was interrupted in many ways. Though Kemble came forward at the end of Act I to make a speech, the disturbance did not diminish. Oulton says "the noise continued till

[7] *Covent Garden Journal,* 1810, p. 153.
[8] *Hist. of Theatres,* II, 218.
[9] 1811, p. 1.

the end of the opera, with the exception of some merriment created by Mr. Incledon's oversetting the table, and falling down with it while singing 'How happy could I be with either?' " As to the farce, it was "rendered inaudible" and "at 10:15 the entertainments terminated."[10]

1813. The year 1813 is important for *The Beggar's Opera* on account of Hazlitt's current criticism (October 23) of Miss Stephens as Polly, on October 22. This review had a direct influence on the later history of the acted play. Hazlitt's editors, Archer and Lowe, say

it was no doubt an important and original utterance in its time. Talfourd declares that it "restored *The Beggar's Opera,* which had long been treated as a burlesque appendage to the Newgate Calendar, to its proper station."

We are told by Hazlitt, in his essay "On Patronage and Puffing," about some of the circumstances attending the writing of the article for the *Morning Chronicle* of October 23, the day after the performance.

I shall not easily forget bringing him [Perry, the editor] my account of her [Miss Stephens] first appearance in *The Beggar's Opera*. . . . I had been down on a visit to my friends near Chertsey, and on my return had stopped at an inn near Kingston-upon-Thames, where I had got *The Beggar's Opera,* and had read it over night. The next day I walked cheerfully to town. It was a fine sunny morn, in the end of autumn, and as I repeated the beautiful song, "Life knows no return of Spring," I meditated my next day's criticism, trying to do all the justice I could to so inviting a subject.

Parts of the review, as reprinted in *A View of the English Stage,* under date of October 23, are given below.

The Beggar's Opera was acted at Covent-Garden last night, for the purpose of introducing Miss Stephens in the character of Polly. The play itself is among the most popular of our dramas, and one which the public are always glad to have some new excuse for seeing acted again.

Hazlitt then discusses at length the merits of the play, running at times to extravagant praise. As to the representation on this occasion:

The innocent and amiable Polly found a most interesting representative in Miss Stephens. Her acting throughout was simple, unaffected, graceful, and full of tenderness. Her tones in speaking, though low, and suited to the gentleness of

[10] *Hist. of Theatres,* II, 252.

the character, were distinct, and varied with great flexibility. She will lose by her performance of this part, none of the reputation she has gained in Mandane. The manner in which she gave the song in the first act, "But he so teazed me," &c. was sweetness itself: the notes undulated through the house, amidst murmurs of rapturous applause. She gave equal animated feeling to the favourite air, "Cease your funning." To this, however, as well as to some other of the songs, a more dramatic effect might perhaps be given.

1814. A two-act version of *The Beggar's Opera* was presented at Covent Garden on December 14, 1813. It was prepared for the manager, Harris, by Bishop, later Sir Henry. This version was again used in 1814, and such a shortened text, in general, was maintained for a good many years. The revised opera as published in the editions of 1814 and 1815 show what sad work was done to the original play. The text during this period went far from Gay's copy, and was often wretchedly distorted. The condensation frequently involved a loss of the best flavor, robbed the lines of much of the subtlest satire and humor, and even spoiled some of the proper plot development. The additions were usually weak and colorless, not at all on a par with the other passages. Yet, in spite of protests from conservatives, in and out of print, the work of alteration continued.

1815. At first, Drury Lane seems not to have gone so far as Covent Garden in the changing of the play, although formerly it had followed the other theatre in its innovations. Genest says of a performance on September 28, 1815, at Drury Lane, "the Beggar's Opera was acted properly—not as at Covent Garden." Oxberry refers to the Drury Lane production of this year as follows:

In 1815, we behold him [Thomas Cooke] at Drury Lane theatre, where he sustained that most arduous of operatic efforts, Captain Macheath. The Theatrical Inquisitor thus treats that performance: "The Beggar's Opera has been revived in a manner worthy of the first theatre in the world. Indeed, a manifest reform has taken place at this house, since last season, in the mode of casting characters. . . . He [Cooke] gave the beautiful songs, which belong to this character, most expressively and chastely; rejecting all meretricious ornament, and judiciously adopting the plain, straightforward style of singing, suitable to the character. In another respect we allot him deserved praise. He is intelligible in his singing; every word is distinctly pronounced, and we are enabled, in some degree, to understand what he is about. This is truly a novelty; and, though the unintelligible way in which the words of songs are given by the generality of singers, may form no great cause of regret, but rather the contrary, in certain modern operas, yet in Gay's piece, where every line sparkles with the most

brilliant wit and satire, the case is widely different. . . . Upon the whole, we give his Macheath a decided preference to that of Incledon."[11]

Hazlitt's comments in his review (dated November 4) of the performance at Drury Lane on Saturday, October 28, 1815, are significant:

We are glad to announce another interesting Polly at Drury-Lane Theatre, in the person of Miss Nash, from the Theatre-Royale, Bath. We are glad of everything that facilitates the frequent representation of that immutable play, the Beggar's Opera, which unites those two good things, sense and sound, in a higher degree than any other performance on the English or (as far as we know), on any other stage. It is to use the best proof of the good sense as well as real delicacy of the British public, to see the most beautiful women in the boxes and the most veteran critics in the pit whenever it is acted. All sense of humanity must be lost before the Beggar's Opera can cease to fill the mind with delight and admiration.

Toward the end of his article Hazlitt adds that the Peachum and Lockit "were admirably dressed. A hearty old gentleman in the pit, one of the old school, enthusiastically called out, 'Hogarth, by G—d!'" He concludes:

The ladies in the scene at the tavern with Macheath were genteeler than usual. This we were pleased to see: for a great deal depends on the casting of that scene. How Gay must have chuckled, when he found it once fairly over, and the house in a roar! They leave it out at Covent-Garden, from the systematic attention which is paid there to the morals of the town![12]

1810. A performance at Covent Garden on June 4, 1810, for the benefit of Charles Mathews, is recorded by Genest. He has,

Beggar's Opera, in 2 acts—the characters to be dressed as on the first representation of the play in 1727[8], and taken from Hogarth's celebrated picture—Macheath (for that night only) Mathews, who will attempt the voice and manner of a celebrated performer of that character—(perhaps Incledon).[13]

The same performance is described by Mrs. Mathews, but under date of March, 1815:

On his benefit night he attracted a crowded house by his performance of Macheath in the "Beggar's Opera," in professed imitation of Mr. Incledon, and the piece was dressed in the original costume of the day in which it was written.

[11] *Dram. Biog.*, III, 114 ff.

[12] *On the English Stage.* From *Examiner.*

[13] VIII, 554. The same date is given by John Addison, intro. to his music ed.

Miss Stephens was the Polly, and she was so struck at times with the similitude of the present hero to him to whom she had so often performed in the same opera, that sometimes she found it difficult to retain the characteristic earnestness of Polly, and never suffered her eyes to look upon Macheath while she was singing. It had altogether a very amusing effect, and was very successful throughout.[14]

Hazlitt wrote, on July 27, 1816, of the appearance of Miss Merry as Polly:[15]

We have no doubt . . . that she will make in time a very interesting representative of one of the most interesting characters on the stage, for one hardly knows any character more artless and amiable than Gay's Polly, except perhaps Shakspear's Imogen. And Polly has the advantage on the stage, for she *may* be *sung*, but Imogen cannot be *acted*.

Of Miss Kelly he says that her "Lucy was excellent. She is worthy to act Gay."[16]

Of the two-act version of Covent Garden in this year (November 6, 1816, etc.) Oulton says, "The Beggar's Opera was this season compressed to two acts, but the poignancy of the author's satire was considerably diminished."[17]

1817. In another place he has more to say about it:

Miss Buggins . . . was introduced to a London audience in Polly, in Beggar's Opera, June 19 [1817]. Though several airs in this opera were omitted, on account of vocal abilities, yet the manager deserves commendation for adhering to the original as much as possible; particularly as a wretched mutilation of it was produced at the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden. . . . This admirable piece of satire, had, during the preceding season [1816-17], been cut down to two acts at the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden. The compression of such an opera, (which was never known in the days of Garrick)[18] certainly evinced a most miserable want of theatrical judgment, and probably the "Beggar's Opera" was never so offered to any audience before, even by the manager of a barn!!![19]

1820. *The Beggar's Opera* was revived in the summer of 1820 (July 22), at the Haymarket, solely for the purpose of exhibiting

[14] *Memoirs of Charles Mathews*, II, 218.

[15] July 25, English Opera House.

[16] *On the English Stage*. From *Examiner*.

[17] *Hist. of Theatres*, II, 339.

[18] For a different kind of alteration "in the days of Garrick," see account of the opera at D.L. in 1777.

[19] *Hist. of Theatres*, III, 244-245.

Madame Vestris as Macheath. It ran for twelve nights successively, according to Genest. When Drury Lane opened on November 4 for the winter season it was again produced there, with Madame Vestris in the same character. Her success after 1820 seems to have been pronounced. Macheath was for many years "one of her most popular parts, and it was much in demand when special attractions were desired for a benefit."[20] According to the life of the actress, published in 1839, the year of the important revival at Covent Garden, "This character raised her reputation above all her enemies; the town rang with her praises and every print shop was decorated with her likeness." The biographer quotes a song about her, one verse of which goes:

> In *Macheath* how she leers, and unprincipled appears,
> And tips off the bumpers so jolly,
> And then, oh, so blest, on two bosoms to rest,
> And change from a *Lucy* to *Polly*.

In the very style of Lavinia Fenton she appears to have taken London by storm, as well as Dublin and Liverpool, in her two main rôles of Don Giovanni and Captain Macheath. According to Oxberry, it was said of her in dramatic circles, "'Tis woman that seduces all mankind."[21] People came this time, perhaps, to see the player more than the play; at any rate, she performed to immense audiences of enthusiastic admirers at various theatres, including the Haymarket, Covent Garden, and Drury Lane. The *Memoirs* of 1839 state that Elliston had to raise her salary "to make her stick to the breeches" when she got tempting offers on every hand. In Dublin she played to crowding and applauding audiences, while in Liverpool she attracted the taste of the whole town. In the latter city she was "placarded on every wall, and her likeness stuck in the window of every print-shop. The town rang with her praises, and for twenty-seven nights Macheath was received with cheers by a Liverpool audience."[22]

Of the Drury Lane performance of November 4, 1820, Genest says that "the additional scene represented Marybone Gardens as they were about the time when the Beggar's Opera was written—Macheath was betrayed by the women at these gardens instead of a

[20] Matthews and Hutton's *Actors and Actresses,* III, 129 ff.
[21] *Dram. Biog.,* V, 196. The line is from one of Gay's songs.
[22] *Memoirs of Madame Vestris*, p. 20.

tavern." Drury Lane had now become as unscrupulous as Covent Garden in changing Gay's text. Additions, if not omissions, seem to have been in favor at this playhouse. On the performance of November 7, at the same theatre, the *European Magazine* comments as follows:

> This evening the "Beggar's Opera" was performed with the novelty of Madame Vestris as Macheath, and a young lady débutant as Polly. To which were added the charms of Marylebone Gardens in their pristine glory. Macheath was received with great applause, and as an exhibition of female versatility there was some interest in Madame Vestris's adroit representation of the gay highwayman. She sang with a bold plainness not unsuitable to the dashing spirit of the robber; and her acting was appropriate and animated. But the figure necessarily destroys the illusion, and Macheath is nothing more than a premature scapegrace, a sort of Little Pickle mounted into the dignity of boots and cravat, prating and profligacy.[23]

1821. At Bath, on January 15, 1821, "the scene which had been laid aside in London was very properly retained, but Macheath's women of the town were the worst ever seen." Such is the opinion of Genest,[24] who charges the women with prudishness. On October 19, Miss Paton appeared as Polly at Covent Garden. She was one more exponent of Gay's heroine to marry a title, the nobleman this time being Lord William Lennox. On October 23, at the Haymarket, the play was changed to suit caprice. Genest says that "all the women of the town were omitted except two—they got possession of Macheath's pistols, and Peachum with the officers entered immediately—nothing could be more flat."

1825. According to common practice, *The Beggar's Opera* was used on April 27, 1825, to bring out a new play at the Haymarket. Genest has sixteen times for *Turnout* and *The Beggar's Opera*. The summer season at the English Opera House, Strand, opened with Gay's comedy, in two acts, on July 2.

1828. Performances in London, at Covent Garden, and Edinburgh in the early part of 1828 celebrated the one hundredth anniversary of the original season of *The Beggar's Opera*. At the reopening of Covent Garden on November 27 the play was used as an afterpiece to Kean's *Richard III*. Apparently the two-act version was still em-

[23] From Matthews and Hutton's *Actors and Actresses*, III, 136.
[24] IX, 125.

ployed, because the edition printed by Lowndes in this year is cut to two acts, like that of 1815.

1829. *The Beggar's Opera* was often substituted for another play, on short notice. On January 12, 1829, *Richard II* was to be revived, and the cast was announced. When Kean became indisposed the piece was changed to *The Beggar's Opera.*

The Cumberland edition of the play in 1829 contains a prefatory remark which, a hundred years after the original production, is curiously prophetic for the century ahead: "it can never become obsolete. . . . Hence . . . we may safely predict the immortality of The Beggar's Opera, with all its allusions."

1837. Joseph Thomas, writing in July, 1837, for the introduction to his new edition, illustrated by Cruikshank, says:

> The Beggar's Opera continues, and is likely to continue, a stock piece, as its wit, humour, and universal satire belong to no peculiar class of men or time. . . . The piece has not been lately very effectively cast, nor, in the present dearth of real comic talent, does it appear likely soon to be so.

1839. According to Wyndham, *The Beggar's Opera* was the salvation of Covent Garden theatre in 1839. The house had seen hard luck at the first of the season, which had opened on September 30. Ruin stared Mathews, the manager, in the face.

> Light broke in upon darkness, however, in an unexpected way. Somebody (possibly Bishop,[25] who was reappointed musical director by Madame Vestris) had the happy inspiration of reviving the Beggar's Opera, dressed for the first time since its first production in the original costume, and it achieved instantaneous success. . . . To every one's surprise, the receipts went up, and a long and remunerative run was entered upon.[26]

Mr. and Mrs. Mathews had already decided to retire from Covent Garden when the stratagem of *The Beggar's Opera* was resorted to. Once more the play proved its sturdy vitality in making theatrical history. The cast at this revival was a fine one. Madame Vestris played Lucy, leaving her male rôle to William Harrison, who is said to have "performed Macheath for upwards of 400 nights in London."[27] Harrison was prominent at this period for his attempts to place Eng-

[25] Probably Madame Vestris herself.
[26] *Annals of C.G.*, II, 147.
[27] Boston ed., 1854.

lish opera on a reputable basis. *The Beggar's Opera* was at both Covent Garden and Drury Lane on December 3.

1841. It is strange to find the characters of *The Beggar's Opera* again reversed on February 10 and 11, 1841, this time at Hull, of all places where we should least expect such a performance.

1870. Another parody was got up as late as 1870, attesting the veteran popularity of the play and the wide acquaintance with it. This was *The Beggar's Uproar,*[28] a burlesque by Hubert Jay Morice, brought out at the Surrey Theatre in May of that year. It seems not to have been printed.

1871. In 1871 *The Beggar's Opera* underwent the novelty of being performed in the morning at the Gaiety Theatre, Strand.

1878-79. What was called, until 1920, the last great revival of *The Beggar's Opera* occurred in 1878-79, when Sims Reeves, the most noted modern Macheath prior to the production at Hammersmith, had his memorable performances. He says:

> Many as have been my successes in Italian Opera and Oratorio, I never achieved a greater triumph than that which I obtained at the end of 1878 and at the beginning of 1879 at Covent-Garden, in the "Beggar's Opera," the "Waterman," and other English works of the same class.[29]

Reeves is only one more actor who, sooner or later, was brought in contact with *The Beggar's Opera* by special request. He says of his taking the rôle:

> After singing much in opera, Italian and English, I was invited to assume the leading part in what is really a comedy with songs, though *Beggar's Opera* is its historic name. That was something quite new to me.[30]

His success, however, was distinct, and brought the play into peculiar prominence in the last quarter of the past century. On the occasion of Reeves' initial performance at this time, *Punch* said that "the house was literally crammed from floor to ceiling."

1886. Reeves gave in 1886 the last important performances of the century. There were two matinées for this revival, at the Avenue Theatre, on November 3 and 10. The production was advertised as "By Mr. Sims Reeves and powerful Company."

[28] Notice the pun on the original title.

[29] *Life and Recollections,* p. 252.

[30] *My Jubilee,* p. 233.

In his playing of Macheath, Reeves introduced, at the end of the opera, the well-known song from *The School for Scandal*. "Down among the Dead Men" was also interpolated. A special orchestration of the music was arranged for Reeves' use by George Fox.

1914. Strange to say, *The Beggar's Opera* was to enter the twentieth century in England in fragment. One act was offered to London audiences in the summer of 1914, as part of a revue entitled *As It Used to Be,* produced at the Little Theatre. The first night was Tuesday, June 9, and the entertainment ran for the rest of that week, with matinées on Thursday and Saturday. The revue included an act of *Douglas,* an act of *Hamlet,* as played in the days of Garrick, a scene from *Romeo and Juliet,* and an act of *The Beggar's Opera.* The whole affair was thrown into an eighteenth-century atmosphere, in which such devices as a harpsichord, old-style playbills, quaint stage settings, and a prologue were brought into use. The *London Times* called the pieces shown glimpses of stage history; these, unfortunately for the enterprise of the promoter, Mr. Bertram Forsyth, were only half successful in revival. Nevertheless, though there was doubt about the other sketches, *The Beggar's Opera* came through the experiment with considerable distinction.

Two newspaper criticisms indicate the comparison in favor of the musical comedy. The *Daily Telegraph* for Wednesday, June 10, said:

> The last episode was an act of the "Beggar's Opera," and this came off best. Some of us may have found ourselves discovering again what excellent stuff it is. The wit and freshness of Gay's pleasant style was infinitely welcome, and though this, too, was taken with a touch of parody, the general effect was much more like a real performance of the old stage than anything which had gone before.

The *London Times,* for the same day, said:

> Happiest of all is the performance of *The Beggar's Opera,* which is just honestly given on its merits, and merits that prove quite appreciable even at this time of day. There is a taking lilt in the songs, which are capitally sung by Miss Evangeline Hilliard and Miss Hannah Jones and Mr. Laurence Leonard, and there is a grim, concise humour in the dialogue which has by no means lost its relish.

CHAPTER IX

THE REVIVAL AT HAMMERSMITH

WHEN Reeves was bringing *The Beggar's Opera* before the English public in 1886, with short engagements in various places, the *London Times* suggestively said:

> If one reads of the enormous success of the first production, which, as the wits of the time remarked, made Rich the manager gay and Gay the poet rich, one likes to contemplate the chance of a real revival of this the most English of all English operettas.

1920. The chance came in 1920. *The Beggar's Opera,* apparently intended by the Muses to survive to the latest generation, returned to the stage at Hammersmith, where almost exactly a hundred and thirty-five years before, on June 10, 1785, Gay's piece was revived for a short run at the New Theatre. Without warning, except for the very favorable reception of the fragment of the play in 1914, it bobbed up in the out-of-the-way Lyric Theatre, beyond the limits of London, on Saturday evening, June 5, 1920. At the present time, after having almost reached its third anniversary, the opera is still entertaining the crowds of people who leave behind the latest modern offerings of the city and seek outside the charm of an old eighteenth-century classic by John Gay. This run, the greatest since the season of 1728, and far outstripping that in the number of performances, even when allowance is made for changed theatrical conditions, has been one of the sensational dramatic surprises of recent years, not unlike the experience of Drinkwater's *Abraham Lincoln.* The marvel really lies in the fact that a revived play, nearly two centuries old, has surpassed its original appearance. Some writers have called the run the most remarkable thing in the long history of the English stage. Yet it is true that the piece was intended only for a stop-gap in the Lyric repertoire, with some doubt even on the part of members of the inner circle, and that failure of the experiment was predicted by more than one! The enterprise and good judgment of the pro-

ducer, Mr. Nigel Playfair, whose work was already so favorably known, are still further attested by his present choice. To have actually restored one of the landmarks of English theatrical history—a task made harder every year away from 1728—is indeed an artistic achievement. Well might the manager refuse to move his production to the center of London—when his piece succeeded during the general slump at the playhouses, with the regular operatic season almost down to zero. Having accomplished for *The Beggar's Opera* at the time of the second anniversary performance the longest current run in London, the master of the revels at Hammersmith had good reason to congratulate himself.

The Hammersmith cast, as arranged on the initial appearance of June 5, is here given in full, because of its historic importance:

Peachum,	*Frederic Austin.*
Lockit,	*Arthur Wynn.*
Macheath,	*Frederick Ranalow.*
Filch, Mat of the Mint,	*Alfred Heather.*
The Beggar,	*Arnold Pilbeam.*
Mrs. Peachum,	*Elsie French.*
Polly Peachum,	*Sylvia Nelis.*
Lucy Lockit,	*Violet Marquesita.*
Diana Trapes,	*Beryl Freeman.*
Jenny Diver,	*Nonny Lock.*

Drawer: *David Hodder.* Turnkey: *Jack Girling.*

Members of Macheath's Gang:

Alan Trotter, Malcolm Rignold, John Clifford, Edward Barrs, Charles Staite.

Women of the Town:

Ella Milne, Dolores Denison, Vera Hurst, Winifred Christie, Lilian Stanford, Edith Bartlett, Enid Lindsay, Nonny Lock.

As to the individual parts in the opera, hardly a single person has been hailed as the star. All have worked together modestly as a unit for high professional excellence. Of the initial cast, perhaps Miss Nelis (Polly), Mr. Ranalow (Macheath), and Miss French (Mrs. Peachum) have received the highest honors from the press, but it is

not easy to decide. The players and the play have been properly emphasized together, with fairness to both. The succeeding Pollies (nearly a dozen in all) have received very favorable comment: Katherine Arkandy, Vivian Roberts, Alice Mason, Lilian Stanford, Pamela Baselow, Kathleen Hilliard, Mildred Watson, Rose Hignell, and Dorothy Smithard. At times Pitt Chatham and Arthur Hosking have taken the rôle of Macheath with distinction, and Scott Russell, relieving Mr. Austin for the work of conducting the orchestra, as the roguish Peachum has fitted himself into the very atmosphere of Newgate. Some dramatic productions can ill afford to risk a substitute, but *The Beggar's Opera* seems to suffer no injury whatever.

To quote from the Lyric playbill of 1920,

> In this version of Mr. Gay's famous English Ballad Opera every possible effort has been made to recapture the spirit of the original work, much of which was "improved away" in the representations of the early nineteenth century. Unfortunately in an age which lacks the leisure of the eighteenth century the opera cannot be given in its entirety; in the work of curtailment and selection the producer has been much helped by Mr. Arnold Bennett.

If by "curtailment and selection" the idea of expurgation is intended, it is evident that the duties of the revision committee were fairly light, to judge by the American performance of the English company. As was to be expected, the vocabulary of 1728 has been partially pruned, but the language of the current opera stands fairly close to the original version—thanks to the common sense of its friends. Certain spicy speeches have been allowed a modern hearing, and, as one American newspaper remarked, the play still has its "moments." The principal alteration is noted in the arrangement of scenes. As staged in 1920 these are: Act I, Peachum's House. Act II, Scene i, A Tavern near Newgate; Scene ii, Newgate. Act III, Scene i, A Street; Scene ii, Newgate; Scene iii, The Condemn'd Hold.[1] Students of Gay's text will recognize the changes here, especially in the case of Act III. This act is trimmed heavily. The first six scenes of it are merged into material for one new street scene, apparently the work of Mr. Bennett. It is natural that modern interpolations for a piece nearly two hundred years old should fit poorly, but this street scene—to judge again by the American performance—

[1] Some later revision has included two new scenes and modified the text as originally reproduced.

impresses one as being the least successful thing about the whole production. At any rate, the playgoer of to-day is seeing a real three-act version of Gay's comedy, with the original introduction (revised considerably) and the original conclusion (practically unchanged).

An outstanding feature of the revival is the new settings of the airs and the additional music by Mr. Frederic Austin, who recreated Peachum in the play. The overture and the ballad tunes have been newly arranged, and appropriate compositions have been inserted: interludes, dances, music for dialogue, and descriptive music to accompany the change of setting or action. Throughout, Mr. Austin has proved himself an artist who benefits and does not damage his original. While only a selection from the many songs has been made, excellent taste has been used; and several characteristic numbers omitted in preceding performances have been preserved.

The scenery and costumes were designed by the late Mr. C. Lovat Fraser, who thus further demonstrated his knowledge of his field and his skill in finding an artistic medium for the reproduction of the past. The simplicity of the setting has been typical of the whole production. The standard of modern stage design has doubtless been raised considerably through the work on *The Beggar's Opera* by Mr. Fraser, whose sudden death in 1921 was a distinct blow to English theatrical art.

A few quotations from English journals, mainly regarding the opera itself in revival, will be in place, to show how Gay again captured his countrymen.

The *London Times* said in June, 1920,

> The beggars have come back to town, and taken up their abode at the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, where, to judge from the enthusiasm of their welcome on Saturday night, they should be able to disport themselves for as long as they will.

The *Spectator* said at the same time:

> Its revival is more than a literary event. There is the Gilbertian capacity for inversion, while the charming airs to which "The Beggar's Opera" is set surpass Sullivan for all his humor.

1921. The *Overseas Daily Mail,* February 26, 1921, told how

> the play attracts one of the most remarkable audiences in London. Almost every night its stalls are thickly peppered with celebrities, many of whom have seen the play six, seven, or eight times.

The *National Review,* March, 1921, seemed to summarize the feelings of a wholly attracted London, one half of which has evidently gone to see *The Beggar's Opera* and the other half of which is likely to do the same: "It is one of the most delightful performances that has ever been put on the English stage. . . . Great is the public debt to those responsible for this tribute to Gay's genius." The editor testifies that "those who go often discover some added attraction at each performance."

A writer in the *Sketch,* May 25, 1921, declared that

> The Beggar's Opera has, in fact, made a genuine success of merit. It is one of the best productions which London has seen for years, as well as one of the most successful.

When the spokesman for the *Times* invited the beggars to disport themselves at the Lyric as long as they wished, he did not know that the four hundred and sixteenth performance would be reached on June 6, 1921, the time of the first anniversary. On this date a new act-drop, representing "A Prospect of Newgate," was introduced, and souvenirs in the form of a working scale model of the scene of the opera, from Mr. Fraser's design, were presented to the audience. As the *Westminster Gazette* found, it was a "Gay Anniversary."

Significant comment born of this festive occasion is recorded in *Truth,* June 8, 1921:

> "The Beggar's Opera" is for many reasons the representative document of the new spirit in the theatre. The anniversary is an event of historic importance. Everybody who has seen it will have offered their cordial congratulations either personally or in the spirit to Mr. Playfair and his company. Its success differs from all other theatrical successes, in that it is a success in which everyone of us can take a genuine pride. Other pieces may have enjoyed long runs and brought pleasure to many and profit to a few, but their successes belonged only to those who were actively concerned in them. The success of "The Beggar's Opera" belongs to all who are sincerely interested in the theatre as the expression of national life. For "The Beggar's Opera" is a work with a history behind it. It is one of our national monuments, one of the few landmarks which England has contributed to the whole history of music. One could have imagined it revived for a single performance by a company of learned amateurs, produced behind closed doors for fear of scandal, and then consigned once more to oblivion. Instead of that it has been produced as a commercial venture, cleverly staged, and admirably acted. To the surprise of everybody it has been not only an artistic success, but a commercial one, too. . . . "The Beggar's Opera" is the first big success in the vulgar sense of the word that has been staged by

a real artist. It means—and there are plenty of smaller happenings to corroborate the statement—that people who want to make money are at last waking up to the fact that good art is a paying concern.

1922. On January 19, 1922, a revised version of the 1920 production was offered at Hammersmith. A new scene for Act III (the interior of Diana Trapes' gaming house) was presented, and nine of Gay's songs formerly omitted, with some new incidental music by Mr. Austin, were given a place, certain lyrics being dropped to make room for the later selections. This alteration, which was pronounced an improvement or a pleasing change, constituted a real reason why the large and loyal family of patrons of *The Beggar's Opera* should make a fresh start with their attendance. If the play continues long enough, the rest of the songs and some more of the scenes not yet employed might as well, in turn, be given a hearing.

The eight hundred and twenty-eighth performance of *The Beggar's Opera* was reached on June 5, 1922, the occasion of the second anniversary at Hammersmith. With great enthusiasm and much applause the audience greeted the perennial favorite, in standard form except for a new street scene at the beginning of Act III, dealing with the second arrest of Macheath. The personal touch was again remembered in the metal match-box souvenirs, bearing a medallion of Fraser's Macheath, presented to those lucky enough to be inside the Lyric that night. When the opera passed the nine hundred mark on August 8, with Sylvia Nelis back in the cast after her second mission of carrying *The Beggar's Opera* to the western world, and when the receipts for certain weeks of the summer, during the warmest weather, became larger than any during the whole engagement, the shades of two theatrical managers, John Rich and Colley Cibber, for entirely different reasons, had good cause to seek the best advice of the Elysian Council for an explanation!

Public opinion, through the London papers, may well be quoted to show the general impression of the unique hold of *The Beggar's Opera* on the modern stage after two years of continuous performance.

The *Morning Advertiser,* June 6, 1922, issued this warning:

If there are people who have not yet seen "The Beggar's Opera" they are strongly advised to do so at once, as it is the most charming entertainment in London.

The *Morning Post,* June 6, 1922, thus committed the play to posterity:

> There seems no reason why this opera should suffer from the common complaint of mortality. It obeys none of the fashions that come and go. Like certain other institutions it is a fashion to itself, and it deserves as long a run as the National Gallery or Madame Tussaud's or Tennyson's brook. Pollies may come and Macheaths may go, but "The Beggar's Opera" is a joy for ever.

The *Queen,* June 17, 1922, revealed the practical force of Gay's work at the present time:

> "The Beggar's Opera" has developed from an experiment into an institution. Going to "The Beggar's Opera" is like going to Westminster Abbey or to the Tower of London. Nay, more, it is almost like going to one's office. The habit, once acquired, is not easily shaken off.

Finally, the July number of the *Musical Times,* a periodical not given to compliment unearned, set the modern achievement of *The Beggar's Opera* in its true light:

> Such an established success does not need any praise at this day, unless one may say that the gems of tunes sparkle more gaily and the witty lines seem to have more life in them than ever. It is difficult to see why the opera should ever stop, because it is a *compôte* of the most delicious trifles strung together on the airiest of themes, a *compôte* of the bloom of flowers and fruit, with just enough of sun and dew added to give healthy sparkle to the whole.

It is a notable fact that *The Beggar's Opera* has been played extensively away from London since December, 1920. New York saw the revival before any English city outside of the capital,[2] but the British touring rights of the Playfair production were secured before the first year was out, and the provincial journeys of the Newgate gentry have covered wide territory during the last two years. In regard to the belated appearance of the piece at Liverpool, the *Post* of that place, May 16, 1921, jealously exclaimed:

> How this thing could have lain fallow for all these years remains a mystery. Gay's opera ought to be heard in the provinces without delay. It is something of a scandal that it should have been sent to America without having toured here.

Since this was written, *The Beggar's Opera* has been taken on the road with a second company, and a part of the time with a third, under the management of Messrs. Platt and Eaton. The itinerary,

[2] See Chapter X.

which began at Harrowgate in July, 1921, has included such important cities as Liverpool, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Oxford, Cambridge, Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds, Sheffield, Newcastle, Nottingham, and Bristol, some with return engagements. The Scottish reception has been as hearty as the English. When the American, French, Australian, and South African branches of the revival are added to the list of triumphs, Gay's classic may be said to have newly furnished positive evidence of real success. The American tours, to both Canada and the United States, are fully treated later in this volume; they will probably remain the most important offshoot of the Hammersmith production, though the other outer pilgrimages of the opera have considerable interest. At Paris the piece ran for several weeks at the Théâtre Caumartin. Performed in English, it received the warmest commendation from prominent French dramatic and musical critics, who hailed it as a genuine work of art. The play has since penetrated to Australia and South Africa, no doubt the first invasion by *The Beggar's Opera* of those regions of the world.

The popularity of the resurrected touchstone of 1728, which has become almost as much of a novelty as it was on its original appearance, to the astonishment of more than one dramatic sage, is attested by various signs besides the fact of the lengthy Hammersmith run and its subdivisions. Several thousand copies of both the playbook and the vocal score have been sold in the theatre, and other editions of the piece have been widely circulated, along with new reprints of more works by Gay, including the suppressed *Polly*. Airs from the pioneer musical comedy are now being used at formal concerts. Many of the songs have been recorded for the gramophone. A set of porcelain figures of the characters in the play, the work of Miss Gwendolen Parnell, of the Chelsea Potteries, has been placed in the London Museum at Lancaster House, St. James's. The shops of London have been filled with such marks of the new fashion of *The Beggar's Opera* as statuettes of Polly and Lucy and candlesticks supporting the invincible Macheath, reminding us of the palmy days of 1728. A book of caricatures by Powys Evans, clever drawings of the players, the producer, the stage artist, and Gay himself, has been published. A club composed of those who have attended the play at least eight times, and who promise to go regularly thereafter, has been formed. Several letters to the London papers have complained that the effect

of the opera has sometimes been spoiled by excessive applause and the desire for encores. The Christmas number of *Truth* in 1920 was given over to a close parody called *The Westminster Beggar's Opera,* full of political satire; and an educational journal has even printed a brief version of the opera for children.[3] Gay's piece has been subjected to burlesque at the May Week festivities of Cambridge University, in a sketch called *The Bedder's Opera,* dealing with undergraduate life; and his song-cycle has been adapted for burlesque in Walter Garstang's *The Student's Opera,* treating themes of interest to a modern university. The career of Lavinia Fenton has furnished the basis for a romance, called *Madame Flirt,* by Charles E. Pearce, biographer of the actress in 1913. A ballad opera of tramp life, directly modeled on Gay's work by W. H. Davies, with songs set to old tunes by Mr. Austin, and another by John Drinkwater on the life of Burns, similarly set by Mr. Austin, have been given public notice; only the persistence of the parent piece has barred such compositions from the theatre. Finally, the performance of *Polly,* kept so successfully off the English stage for many years, has actually been accomplished, after two productions in competition between rival managers were once imminent. London has at last the novelty of *The Beggar's Opera* and its sequel running at the same time.

1923. Something should be said of the present operatic influence of this rediscovered bonanza. The attractive music of *The Beggar's Opera,* which Mr. Ranalow, the famous Macheath, recently called "Gay set to the music of England,"[4] is able to compete with modern songs in the theatre; and now current everywhere within British bounds, as well as spread to other English-speaking domains, it has stimulated genuine interest once more in light opera, either as revived or as written newly on the model furnished by Gay. It is the general feeling of the critics that *The Beggar's Opera,* while it may have satirized the Italian product of its time, gives to English opera to-day nothing but example. Opportunely, then, Mr. Playfair has already told the patrons of the Lyric Theatre that they may expect his house to make a specialty of producing in the future light opera by English authors and composers—in view of which the name of the institution will seem to have been most judiciously applied.

[3] *Teachers' World,* Oct. 19, 1921.

[4] In *Referee,* June 4, 1922.

CHAPTER X

THE BEGGAR'S OPERA IN AMERICA

CONTRARY to common assertion, *The Beggar's Opera* apparently was not the first musical comedy on the American stage. One who examines Sonneck's *Early Opera in America* may readily discover that it followed performances of two ballad operas, *Flora,* in 1735, and *The Devil to Pay,* in 1736, at Charleston, South Carolina. In a letter to the present writer, on June 10, 1915, Mr. E. L. Gay said:

> For the time being Sonneck dethrones the Beggar's Opera from its proud position of having been the first musical comedy in America. I am still hoping some old Southern newspaper will restore to Gay's play its priority. Certainly the Beggar's Opera was performed in the West Indies earlier than the date recorded by Sonneck for the first play in the United States, and its popularity in England renders it probable that it was introduced into our country before the time now given as the date of its first performance here.

1750. *The Beggar's Opera,* however, was one of the earliest musical comedies produced in America, and was no doubt the first performed in New York. It appeared in what is now the theatrical capital of the New World as far back as December 3, 1750, at the Nassau Street Theatre, being presented by the Murray and Kean company, which had come to New York from England by way of the West Indies and Philadelphia.

1751. It was also acted on December 10, and on January 14, February 18, and May 13, 1751. On January 14 Kean had his benefit, appearing again as Macheath. He had a record crowd, but much dissatisfaction was created because of an oversale of tickets (money being taken in also at the door), with the result that many who had paid were unable to get inside. "The principles taught on the stage that night might seem to have been practiced in the front of the house for the benefit of the Macheath of the evening."[1] These per-

[1] Seilhamer's *Hist. American Theatre,* I, 9.

formances were "two and a half years before the coming of the Hallam players, to whom credit is usually given for the introduction of the drama in the colonies."[2] The Murray and Kean troupe, besides the two partners, were Tremaine, Woodham, Jago, Scott, Leigh, Smith, Moore, Marks, Master Murray, Miss Nancy George, Miss Osborn, Miss Taylor, Mrs. Osborne, Mrs. Leigh, and Mrs. Davis. Their first play in New York was *Richard III,* produced on March 5, 1750. It is important that they included *The Beggar's Opera* among their early performances.

The bill of *The Beggar's Opera* for Kean's benefit on January 14, 1751, is interesting from several points of view. The *Postboy* advertised the performance thus:

> The Beggar's Opera—with entertainments between the acts, viz. a Harlequin Dance, A Pierrot Dance and the Drunken Peasant, all by a gentleman lately from London; "Miss in her teens" and an Oratorio, to be sung by Mr. Kean. . . . N.B. Those gentlemen and ladies who please to favour this benefit are desired to send for their tickets either to the Theatre, or Printer hereof, as there will be no money taken at the doors, and the Curtain will rise precisely at 6 o'clock. Boxes, 5 shillings. Pit, 4 shillings. Gallery, 2 shillings.[3]

The receipts, as given by Hyde,[4] were (counting New York shillings at twelve and a half cents):

Boxes,	10 at 5s. 50s.	$ 6.25
Pit,	161 at 4s. 644s.	90.50
Gallery,	121 at 2s. 242s.	30.00
		$126.75

The Beggar's Opera was one of the plays to be found in the repertoire of every theatrical company, British or American, in the colonies during the eighteenth century. It was steadily given at intervals from 1750 to the very time of the Revolution; and it soon appeared after the war was over. No decade of the century, beginning with 1750, finds Gay's piece absent. The following cities and towns (and perhaps others) saw it before 1800: New York, Philadelphia, Boston, Providence, Newport, Baltimore, Annapolis, Richmond, Williamsburg, Norfolk, and Charleston. In the nineteenth century, though

[2] Hyde, *N. Y. Sun.*
[3] From Hyde, *N. Y. Sun.*
[4] Article in *N. Y. Sun.*

apparently confined to New York, Boston, and Philadelphia, it covered a period the extent of which is revealed by these significant milestones: 1817, 1840, 1849, 1854, 1855, and 1870.

Seilhamer, a reliable historian of the early stage in our country, commenting on *The Beggar's Opera* in America, says: "The popularity of this work continued down to the Revolution, and among the many Macheaths of that period was the younger Lewis Hallam after he had long been pre-eminent in all the great parts of comedy and tragedy."[5] This writer, in other connections, furnishes proof that the part of Polly was considered the favorite singing rôle of the time. In one place he says that the assumption of it by Mrs. Love "shows that she must have possessed merit as a singer, whatever her qualifications as an actress." She had furthermore worked up to the part from her experience as Jenny Diver in the same piece, which she had played about the time when she sang between the acts at the Nassau Street Theatre, with the original Hallam company. Speaking of the performance of Verling and Mrs. Parker in *The Beggar's Opera* at Annapolis, on February 25, 1761, Seilhamer remarks concerning Gay's play in America, "It had now held the stage for half a century, and for almost half of that period was no American company so 'mean and contemptible' as not to sing or attempt to sing it."[6] It seems to have been a veritable life-saver for the theatres in colonial days.

The most important of the many interesting appearances of *The Beggar's Opera* on the American stage are treated in the following paragraphs, with liberal illustrations from Seilhamer.

1752. On June 18, 1752, the *Maryland Gazette* printed a playbill of the Annapolis Repertoire:[7]

> By Permission of his Honor the President, at the New Theatre in Annapolis by the Company of Comedians from Virginia, on Monday, being the 22nd of this instant, will be performed The Beggar's Opera, likewise a Farce called The Lying Valet. To begin precisely at 7 o'clock. Tickets to be had at the printing office. Box 10s. Pit 7s, 6d. No person to be admitted behind the scenes.

An "N.B." note tells of the intention to play indefinitely at the Upper Marlborough Theatre.

[5] *Hist. American Theatre,* I, 54.
[6] *Ibid.,* I, 261.
[7] From Seilhamer's history, I, 31.

A curious bill in the *Maryland Gazette* advertised the performance of September 14, 1752:

> By Permission of his Honor, the President, At the New Theatre in Upper Marlborough by the Company of Comedians from Annapolis, on Thursday next, being the 14th of September, (at the request of the Ancient and Honorable Society of Free and Accepted Masons) will be performed The Beggar's Opera, with instrumental to each air given by a set of Private Gentlemen; and "a Solo on the French Horn": also a Mason's Song by Mr. Woodham; with a Grand Chorus. To which will be added a Farce call'd The Lying Valet. Tickets to be had at Mr. Benjamin Barry's. Pit 7s, 6d. Gallery 5s.[8]

1759. *The Beggar's Opera* was seen at least three times at Philadelphia in 1759, on August 17 and 24, and November 9. It is quite likely, however, that it had been presented there earlier, in the repertoire of the Murray and Kean company which had visited that city in 1750 on the way to New York.

1766. At Philadelphia, on November 28, 1766, according to Seilhamer's history,

> The cast of Gay's work . . . was noteworthy for the introduction of Mr. Woolls as Macheath and Miss Wainwright as Polly. These singers were both pupils of the celebrated Dr. Arne. Mr. Murphy's two-act comedy, the "Old Maid," originally produced at Drury Lane, in 1761, had its first presentation in America as the afterpiece to the Beggar's Opera on this occasion.[9]

1768. A notice of an interesting American performance of *The Beggar's Opera* in 1768 is given by Seilhamer:

> For the Benefit of Mrs. Parker, By Permission of the Worshipful the Mayor of Williamsburg, at the old Theatre near the Capitol, By the Virginia Company of Comedians, on Friday the 3rd of June will be presented The Beggar's Opera and the Anatomist or Sham Doctor.[10]

1769. The evasion of the theatrical blue law in Massachusetts is seen in the two following instances. On December 26, 1769, *The Beggar's Opera* was read at the Assembly Room in Marblehead, for the benefit of charity.[11]

1770. The piece was likewise given in Boston on March 23, 1770,

[8] From Seilhamer's *Hist. American Theatre,* I, 33.
[9] *Hist. American Theatre,* I, 158.
[10] *Ibid.,* I, 239.
[11] From *Essex Gazette.* (Information from Mr. E. L. Gay.)

by a Mr. Joan, with songs and impersonations. A real performance did not arrive in Boston till 1796.

1783. In Baltimore, on January 24, 1783, the manager of the theatre, Wall, ventured to appear as Captain Macheath. Seilhamer comments on this performance, saying that it was an apparent incongruity

> that Wall, who was pronounced unequal to Leander in the "Padlock" in Colonial days, should now assume the part of Macheath in the Beggar's Opera. But all things are possible for an actor who is also manager. Hallam having attempted it, Wall was disposed not to forego any part he had seen Hallam play.[12]

Hallam had created quite a stir in New York when he undertook for the first time the hero highwayman.

1793-95. A countercurrent to the general popularity of *The Beggar's Opera* in America is found in objections to the play in its regular form. The piece was acted at Charleston in 1793, 1794, and 1795 with "the exceptionable passages obliterated."

1799. It was also produced at Philadelphia in 1799 in a "deodorized version."[13]

1817. Eighteen years later, a peculiar turn of public sentiment against the opera seems to have been strong enough to bring failure to Incledon, the English actor, when he appeared as Macheath in New York, at the Park Theatre, in October, 1817. According to early accounts, the piece was once received with dissatisfaction, and at another time refused by the audience.

It was in such reports, no doubt, that Hazlitt, writing in 1827,[14] found excuse for his criticism of the American public for their disregard of art in general and his favorite opera in particular: "And in America—that Van Diemen's Land of letters—this sterling satire is hooted off the stage, because fortunately they have no such state of manners as it describes before their eyes; and because, unfortunately, they have no conception of anything but what they see." It is possible that he had no eighteenth-century performance in mind, since the popularity of the play before and immediately after the Revolution was an established fact; but the foregoing quotation at least applies

[12] *Hist. American Theatre*, I, 252.

[13] See Sonneck's *Early Opera in America*.

[14] "On Reading New Books."

to the unhappy experience of one company in the United States. It is interesting to note, in this connection, that the first ballad opera has never been so successful here as in England, though partly because of less favorable conditions of production.

1840. The city of Boston, which had not seen *The Beggar's Opera* on the stage till 1796, had another chance in 1840, when the play was presented at the Tremont Theatre in December.[15]

1849-70. The last nineteenth-century performance of *The Beggar's Opera* in America has sometimes been dated June 4, 1849. The production on that occasion, however, at the Bowery Theatre, New York, was not final. The piece was played in Boston on December 13 and 16, 1854 (and perhaps later), by the Harrison-Pyne troupe of comedians from England; in Philadelphia in February, 1855, by the same actors; and in New York on November 28 and December 5, 1870, by a comic opera company, under the direction of Fred Lyster, at Wood's Museum.

When Professor Brander Matthews, writing for *Harper's Magazine* in 1880,[16] prophesied that *The Beggar's Opera* might again be put on by some enterprising American manager, he probably did not expect that it would be a college performance, and not a professional one, that would first revive Gay's famous comedy.

1912. The only production of *The Beggar's Opera* in the United States between 1870 and 1920 was the amateur private presentation on Friday, May 3, 1912, at Yale University. The play was given by the undergraduate members of the Zeta Psi fraternity at their tomb on York Street, New Haven, Connecticut. The production was staged by Mr. C. F. Hunn, of the Department of English, assisted by three advisers from the English Faculty: Professors Adams, Berdan, and Tinker. The text used for the dialogue was based on one of the early editions, in conjunction with the musical version of Oxenford and Hatton. The original lines retained, except for a few slight omissions, were unaltered. The third act was not followed closely, there being only one scene, at Newgate, as in the nineteenth-century prompt-books. Of the women of the town, Betty Doxy and Molly Brazen were omitted, as were also Diana Trapes and Harry Pad-

[15] Clapp's *Boston Stage*, p. 321.

[16] LX, 501.

ington. One song was interpolated, "Down among the Dead Men," as in the revival of Sims Reeves.

1920-21. Mr. Playfair's production of *The Beggar's Opera* was first brought to America late in 1920 and installed at the Greenwich Village Theatre in New York, where it opened on Wednesday, December 29. For some time its fate at this playhouse, remote from the theatrical center, though much less so than the Lyric of Hammersmith, hung in the balance. Then, just as business began to increase, with capacity crowds for the last two weeks, the engagement came to an end on Saturday, January 29, 1921, to make room for another attraction having claim on the theatre. There were around thirty performances in all. If an uptown stage had been available, *The Beggar's Opera* might have taken fire and lighted Broadway for a season.

Four of the major cast appearing in New York were members of the original group at Hammersmith in June: Sylvia Nelis (Polly), Arthur Wynn (Peachum), who had acted Lockit in England, Alfred Heather (Filch), and Nonny Lock (Jenny Diver). The notable substitutions for the American revival were Percy Heming (Macheath), Fedora Roselli (Lucy), Lena Maitland (Mrs. Peachum), and Charles Magrath (Lockit).

All the press reports of the New York production were highly favorable, though the public response was not proportionate. A few published comments will illustrate:

The *Evening Post,* December 30, 1920:

> When "The Beggar's Opera" was revived last night at the Greenwich Village Theatre, history, to some extent, repeated itself. It was a daring experiment to challenge our predilection for the elusively risqué humor and spectacular extravagance of the modern musical show with John Gay's pioneering essay in musical comedy. But it was long before the end of the first act when the audience showed unmistakable signs of its delighted appreciation.

The same paper commented on the minimum of verbal changes necessary; told how certain songs "proved irresistible to ears sated with jazz and syncopation"; and declared the whole piece "a charming splash of color and gaiety."

The *Times,* December 30, 1920:

> The production is a charming one, and the audience began to find it so after wondering coolly through the first act at the remarkable differences it presented from comic opera as it is at present understood on Broadway.

The *Sun,* December 30, 1920, found the play produced "with an accumulating zest":

> It was after the first act that the quaintness and boisterousness of the piece left formality and a light crust of bewilderment behind and raced away to a heartier delight than can possibly be had from a mere reading of it. . . . There are things there that Oscar Wilde might have liked to have said, Whistler have repented not learning by heart, or Gilbert longed to put into verse no more to the merry point.

The *Nation,* January 19, 1921: "but for the secondary matter of decorative skill the earliest of all musical comedies may still be said to be also the best."

Town and Country, February 1, 1921 (bewailing the lack of success in New York): "It was such a perfect thing in its way, kept so deliciously in the spirit of the early Eighteenth Century."

The *Freeman,* February 2, 1921:

> "The Beggar's Opera" points the way to a type of light musical pastime which is practically non-existent on our stage to-day. Here is a musical comedy with "head" in its score and in its book as well as in its costumes and settings.

Musical America, February 12, 1921: "The production of the work . . . was indeed one of the bright moments in an overladen musical and dramatic season."

The *Theatre Magazine,* February, 1921, called the play "the real original opera of two centuries ago. . . . No one should miss it who loves wit and music. It lives as surely as it ever lived."[17] The same periodical for March said:

> The amazing thing about it all is that the story . . . should be almost as pointed in its satire on things of to-day, as when it was written two centuries ago; and that the music . . . should retain for the modern ear all the spontaneity, charm and vital beauty that it ever possessed.

When the opera closed at the Greenwich Village Theatre, it immediately took the road, covering territory in Canada and a few western states. The tour began at Montreal, and included Toronto and Ottawa. Of the stops in Canada, Toronto seems to have liked the play best, a return engagement being secured, but the general Canadian success was considerable. Indianapolis was the second city in the United States (after New York) to see the English players. The

[17] Article of C. H. Meltzer.

Indiana capital, though not supporting the opera financially, commended it on the artistic side. The press praised it highly, and of two dramatic writers preparing lists, the first named it as one of the six best productions during the season at the Murat Theatre, and the second gave it place as one of the best musical attractions of the year. Cincinnati treated it about like Indianapolis.

The Beggar's Opera opened in Chicago on March 20, 1921, at the Central Theatre. It ran for two weeks, took a week's vacation at Toronto, playing a return engagement there, and then came back for three weeks more, under slightly better conditions. The piece was withdrawn after the performance of May 1. On May 2 the Macheath of the company had left the highroad and the gaming house, as well as his disputing wives, to address a convention of the Drama League of America! A week later the company had sailed from Montreal for England. Such is real life—on and off the stage. The freakish attendance at the Central Theatre is almost inexplicable. For days the house went unfilled. Then, when the Toronto return engagement was imminent, the crowds began to come—too late. The critics of the city united in a telegram calling the company back for an indefinite stay; and the piece settled down to less than ordinary business. At the very end of the last week enough people to make several good-sized audiences sought admittance—too late. The reception in Chicago, on the whole, however, was better than that in New York, though the location of theatres may have been responsible. According to one Boston paper, by its treatment of *The Beggar's Opera* Chicago is "again vindicated as capital of the arts."

The Chicago playbill showed slight changes from the New York cast, but the production was substantially that seen at Greenwich Village. The company at Chicago was admirable. Several of the principals were formerly members of Sir Thomas Beecham's opera organization, and had appeared in difficult rôles in England and on the continent. As the papers invariably said, the cast contained no stars; the players worked together perfectly, even the smallest part receiving the finish lent to the greatest. Every singer was an actor; so here were music and drama happily wedded indeed. Some of the songs, to delicious ballad tunes borne up by Mr. Waller's charming old-fashioned orchestra, had to be encored over and over again. The highwaymen's songs in the tavern scene, as well as the cotillon chorus

of the women in the following action, were fine art. Of the piece in general, the entire first act, the scenes of Act II just mentioned, and the conclusion at Newgate came off best.

To introduce all the essential excellencies of the first cast of the American revival is impossible here; sentence summaries of the leading characters must suffice:

Lena Maitland (Mrs. Peachum) exhibited one of the best pieces of comedy acting found in America for twenty years.

Sylvia Nelis (Polly Peachum) was a charming sentimental heroine, as Gay intended,—a rose among thorns.

Margaret Valdi (Polly Peachum, alternate, acting several times in Chicago) gave an entirely adequate performance.

Fedora Roselli (Lucy Lockit), a beautiful woman and a beautiful contralto, beautifully represented the jailor's daughter.

Vera Hurst (Lucy Lockit, alternate, acting several times in Chicago) vehemently, yet harmoniously, harassed the captive Macheath.

Nonny Lock (Jenny Diver) took an unusually vivacious and unaffected part, especially in the "cock and hen" number.

Percy Heming (Macheath) was a most desirable exponent of the gallant highwayman,—regal, melodious, and full of merry capers, in the face of either love or danger.

Arthur Wynn (Peachum) and Charles Magrath (Lockit) offered two almost inseparable rogues, truly and grimly done in character.

Alfred Heather (Filch) proved himself a tenor singer out of the ordinary, and as clever at acting his droll part as at picking a pocket in Gay's world of roguery.

It is proper to say, in conclusion, that no more significant aggregation of talent has been brought from England to America in recent years. This country was complimented by the visit of these artists and should have given them a much better reception. A stay of only four months, while not a bad record in some respects, reflects the inhospitality of the American audience at large.

As to the play in general, the Chicago critics should be allowed to say several things themselves, all under date of March, 1921.

The Beggar's Opera "came to town last night and hugely excited and delighted the audience at the Central Theatre. . . . It's a pippin."—Henriette Weber, in *Chicago Journal of Commerce,* March 21.

During the season there was no review more original than that of Ashton Stevens, in the *Chicago Herald-Examiner,* March 21:

After witnessing the joyful revival of "The Beggar's Opera" at the Central you lean to the notion that they wrote their musical comedy better back in 1728. Believe me when I say that this is more than a theatrical curiosity; it is a show. And you don't have to read up a lot of musical and dramatic histories to get a show out of it.

There was I, a test, you might say, for the piece's appeal to the not immoderately intelligent. I hadn't "read up." I hadn't as much as peeped into Grove's Dictionary of Music. All I knew was that the well-named Mr. Gay, the Mr. Cohan of a more literary day, had been provoked by the soft pastorals and artificial Italian opera and ward politics of the time to compose a comprehensive satire. I made my first acquaintance with it last night, and loved it.

" 'The Beggar's Opera' may have the historical interest of being the first of the musical shows; and it also has the present and vital interest of being one of the best."—Edward C. Moore, in *Chicago Daily Journal,* March 21.

Ten days later, in an attempt to save the situation in Chicago, and keep the play indefinitely, Herman Devries wrote in the *Chicago Evening American,* March 31:

"The Beggar's Opera" is a brilliantly sung, brilliantly acted, brilliantly staged operetta, reminiscent of the golden days of that form of entertainment when melody was more than jazz, and wit was epigram and paradox and quip, not vocal horseplay. . . . There is not a single moment of boredom to be registered in an evening spent in contemplation of such an amalgamation of delights as "The Beggar's Opera."

The critical success and the business failure of *The Beggar's Opera* in America on its initial appearance in revival (1920-21) may be laid to several things. The play might have been better advertised in advance. Too few theatregoers knew what it was. The name *opera* may have been detrimental to its proper dramatic existence. Promising patrons may also have been afraid of the eighteenth-century classic as a production for the intellectuals only. Everywhere the piece was greeted as an "interesting novelty," whereas it should have been taken as a forerunner of current novelties of operatic style. Perhaps it was too soundly artistic for certain American audiences,—which suggests, in view of the steady London sensation, a comparison of national temperaments. Small groups in each city visited really

relished *The Beggar's Opera* as much as its fondest admirers in England, but they were not conspicuous enough to count.

The history of *The Beggar's Opera* on the American stage must include mention of another amateur production, this time coincident with the tour of the first English company in the United States. On March 14 and 16, 1921, performances were given by the Amateurs of Boston at Jordan Hall, for the benefit of the Copley Society Building Fund. That this production was a reflection of the London revival of 1920, and not a shadow of the New York engagement, is proved by the fact that private presentations were made at Whitney Hall, Brookline, on December 16 and 17, 1920, before the English importation was announced. The success of these led to the public offerings three months later. According to the *Boston Transcript,* the acting version used by the Amateurs was not the same as that of the London revival, but one specially prepared for their organization. The Boston papers all complimented the local players, and indicated that they were enthusiastically received. The cast included the following: Macheath, Mr. Hugh Towne; Polly, Mrs. Edward Massey; Lucy, Mrs. G. Loring Tobey, Jr. Among the patronesses was Mrs. Thomas Bailey Aldrich. The Amateurs deserve credit for this venture, the only native American revival of Gay's comedy, aside from the Yale production of 1912, since the professional appearance of 1870 in New York.

The Beggar's Opera returned to America in the fall of 1921, opening at Los Angeles, on November 7, the first theatrical season ever started by an English company on the Pacific coast. A second week was required for Los Angeles, several minor dates being canceled to accommodate the demand for a longer run there. The California cities, including San Francisco, gave the play a most hearty reception, as did Portland, Seattle, Victoria, and Vancouver.

Two significant press reports on the work of the second American tour will help to make the record of the western engagements complete. The *San Francisco Examiner,* November 22, 1921, contained this nimble comment, from the pen of Redfern Mason:

> Dear sir and madam, if you have a love for what is quaint and arch and dainty; if you want to know where Bernard Shaw and Barrie drew their inspiration; if you have a taste for music which is tuneful and full of the sap and the race, hie you straightway to the ticket office of the Columbia Theater and

get places to regale yourselves in the fun and the wit and the irony of "The Beggar's Opera." . . . I don't know whether to call it an old-fashioned novelty or a new-fashioned antiquity; but this I vow and cross my heart in the doing of it, that it is as rarely amusing an entertainment as has seen the glimpses of Stageland these many years.

The *San Francisco Call*, November 22, 1921, through the review of Charles Woodman, told how

the audience paid the company . . . the compliment of remaining seated long after the final curtain, as though anxious for "more of the same," while applauding the singers, musicians—every one connected with the show—for what they had done.

1922. The English company came eastward by way of Winnipeg, reëntering the United States at Minneapolis, where performances were given under the auspices of the University of Minnesota. The play was brought into Chicago, for the third time in two seasons, on February 12, 1922, and stayed at the Olympic Theatre until February 25. In June, after a poll of readers, the *Tribune* announced that among the six most popular musical comedies of the season *The Beggar's Opera* had taken second place. Many smaller Middle Western cities were visited during the late winter and early spring, some of them proving fertile fields for the strolling classic, in both material prosperity and artistic appreciation. The company returned to England from Montreal, after a short engagement there. Taken as a whole, the second season was much more successful than the first, both because of tried acquaintance and because of good report.

Nearly the same cast was presented during 1921-22 as that introduced the year before. The notable exceptions were Dorianne Bawn, alternating with Miss Nelis in conquering the hearts of her hearers by the grace of Polly, and Celia Turrill, replacing Miss Roselli in the character of Lucy and ably representing, with much spirit and good singing, the jailor's daughter. During the season the versatility of the players allowed these occasional substitutes: Mr. Wynn as Macheath; Mr. Magrath as Peachum; Mr. Willard as Lockit; and Miss Turrill as Mrs. Peachum. The new ladies' orchestra, under the direction of Sebastian Unglada, added to the finish of production on this second American tour.

An incidental item of history concerning *The Beggar's Opera* in America is the program of the Opera Reading Club of Buffalo, New

York, on November 4, 1921, three days before the English company began the season at Los Angeles. The trusty favorite was read in part, and the songs were sung by Mrs. Howard Hamilton Baker, all the traditional flavor possible without actual setting being preserved.

1922-23. The record of *The Beggar's Opera* is never finished. Now the play has again returned to America, seeking to win the approval of a wider audience. Its success in doing that is shown by its increasingly cordial reception in cities of the East, including Philadelphia (two weeks at the Metropolitan Opera House, for the benefit of the Valley Forge Memorial), Boston (eight weeks at the Fine Arts Theatre, with unusually favorable reviews from the newspapers), and selected places in New England like Worcester, Providence (two separate engagements), Hartford, and New Haven. Practically the same cast as that of 1921-22 has been presented, the notable exception being Joseph Farrington, in the part of Captain Macheath. The results of this third venture plainly indicate that the lagging interest of two years ago has been permanently retrieved in the new welcome extended to John Gay's old musical comedy. At any rate, aside from furnishing several dramatic object lessons, *The Beggar's Opera* has already opened the eyes of the American musical world; and at least one composer of so-called popular music has announced his intention of trying something of the same nature himself.

CHAPTER XI

GENESIS AND DEVELOPMENT

THE germ of *The Beggar's Opera* originated as early as 1716, nearly twelve years before the play was presented to the public. In a letter to Pope, dated August 30, 1716, Swift says:

> There is a young ingenious Quaker in this town who writes verses to his mistress, not very correct, but in a strain purely what a poetical Quaker should do, commending her look and habit, etc. It gave me a hint that a set of Quaker pastorals might succeed, if our friend Gay could fancy it, and I think it a fruitful subject; pray hear what he says. I believe farther, the pastoral ridicule is not exhausted, and that a porter, footman, or chairman's pastoral might do well. Or what think you of a Newgate pastoral, among the whores and thieves there?

It should be remembered that in 1714, at Pope's suggestion, Gay had published his *The Shepherd's Week,* as a burlesque on the sentimental pastorals of Ambrose Philips. In a measure, then, the Newgate opera may properly be considered as owing its existence directly to the hint of Swift, and indirectly to the pastoral warfare of Philips and Pope.

The works of Gay show that he accepted the proposal of Swift with regard to the Quaker pastoral. His "The Espousal, A Sober Eclogue between two of the People called Quakers," a weak set of verses with little point, was the result. The works of Swift show that the Dean himself made use of one of his suggested pastoral subjects, in *Dermot and Sheelah,* a dialogue between a man and a woman who weed the courtyard of Sir Arthur Acheson. The poem is rough and possesses little merit. Had Gay embodied his knowledge of the low life of London in a Newgate pastoral, his performance might have met the same obscurity which now covers the two productions just mentioned. Fortunately he reserved the Newgate idea for later and fuller treatment, and in dramatic form.

According to Spence, quoting Pope's statements,[1]

> Gay was inclined to try at such a thing, for some time, but afterwards thought it would be better to write a comedy on the same plan. This was what gave

[1] *Anecdotes,* p. 159.

rise to the Beggar's Opera. He began on it, and when first he mentioned it to Swift, the Doctor did not much like the project.

Gay had written little when the Newgate subject was first suggested. If he had adopted the plan at once his effort would perhaps have been merely a short poem in pastoral form. By 1727, however, when he seems to have taken up the hint for serious work, he had seen some substantial dramatic experience. It was natural, then, for him to think of a comedy instead of a poem, and it was easier for him to follow Swift's design, and make something out of it, than it would have been several years before. Now he could place thieves and women of the town upon the stage and try to create a sensation by the novelty of his scheme. The lapse of years had been favorable for his new work, because between 1716 and 1727 much had happened to furnish realistic material of the London underworld, and the vogue of Italian opera had provided ripe fruit for satire on the stage. Of course it might be true that something besides Swift's early hint had directed the dramatist's attention again toward Newgate; but it is not unlikely that as time went on he was constantly turning over the old idea in his mind.

Circumstances happily led to the concentration of Gay's best efforts on this piece. His *Fables* disposed of, he had leisure and inclination to undertake another work on a large scale. His stay at Twickenham, in Pope's own home, among congenial surroundings, was highly favorable for the pleasantry and roguishness put into *The Beggar's Opera*. The final form of the play depends, also, on the growth and prestige of Italian opera, and Gay's recent disappointments at court; these two factors must be considered in connection with Gay's purpose in presenting a work of such a type and with so independent an utterance. The idea of ridiculing the foreign opera, as pointed out in a succeeding chapter, may be responsible for the structure of *The Beggar's Opera;* and Gay's refusal of a position of gentleman usher, offered him in October, 1727, may have served, along with other slights in his life as a courtier, to point many lines in the play. With the refusal of the usherships came a new spirit of independence which set the usually dilatory poet to work with a somewhat serious mission in life. It is fortunate for literature that these events were allowed to take their proper course.

Gay seems to have begun to work definitely on *The Beggar's Opera* in 1727. Swift returned to England in the spring of that year, to stay with Pope at Twickenham, and his arrival may have caused Gay—the third of the literary Yahoos—to resume his plan for something relating to Newgate. The original idea was at last revived, a comedy instead of a pastoral was decided upon, and the gathered material, whatever it may have been, was well in hand. There is no mention of the opera in the correspondence of the three friends before 1727, but the letters of that year contain several references to the progress and completion of the work. In view of Pope's statement that the play was written in the same house with him and Swift,[2] it must have been composed in 1726 and 1727, or wholly in 1727. Circumstances point to the latter idea, for though Swift had been in England in 1726, and had lodged at Pope's villa most of the time, he had soon returned to Ireland on account of the illness of Stella. He is known to have gone, upon his second arrival, to stay with Pope at Twickenham. Gay was there, unoccupied, and the presence of Swift would provide a natural stimulus for the former's literary activity.

Pope's statement just referred to implies that the opera was written before Swift went back to Ireland in September. But Gay's letter to Swift, dated October 22, 1727, shows that his friend had left while the play was incomplete. Here Gay informs Swift that his "Opera is already finished," as if he expects the Dean to be surprised at the completion of the work since his departure the month before. Mrs. Howard's letter to Gay in October, 1727, contains an interesting passage, suggesting that the dramatist was through with the work of composition and ready to arrange for theatrical production: "I desire you will mind the main chance, and be in town in time enough to let the opera have play enough for its life, and for your pockets."

Gay's application to his task seems somewhat unusual, in view of his former pursuits. Lord Bathurst wrote to Pope some time during the year:[3] "If John Gay is not very busy with his new play you may possibly prevail upon him to come with you. I have never seen him since he made a proselyte of Will Shippen." Only the year before Swift had written to Pope, on November 27, 1726: "How comes

[2] See *post*, p. 163.

[3] The letter is headed "Riskins, Friday Night."

friend Gay to be so tedious?[4] Another man can publish 50,000 lies sooner than he can publish 50 fables."

There was a good chance for revision between October 22, when Gay told Swift his opera was finished, and the time when he took it to Cibber at Drury Lane. In the light of any new purpose of political satire, it seems very probable that the play was changed considerably in places after the poet's latest disappointment at court. His allies against the government would have approved of such a scheme. On November 23, 1727, Swift wrote to Gay: "I am very glad your Opera is finished, and hope your friends will join the readier to make it succeed, because you are used by others so ill."

Few manuscripts ever received so much attention as that of *The Beggar's Opera*. We hear how the Queensberrys patronized his work, and how Congreve read the play, giving his opinion of its probable reception. Spence quotes Pope[5] as saying of himself and Swift, "When it was done neither of us thought it would succeed. We showed it to Congreve, who, after reading it over, said, 'It would either take greatly, or be damned confoundedly.' " The Duke of Queensberry told Boswell that on being shown the play he had remarked, "This is a very odd thing, Gay; I am satisfied that it is either a very good thing, or a very bad thing."[6] The piece was even seen by some outside the circle of Gay's close friends. Archibald Ballantyne says:

> An English gentleman who died so lately as 1826, at the age of eighty-nine, dined once with Voltaire at Ferney in 1765, and has left a brief account of their talk that day at table. "He told me," says this Major Broome, "of his acquaintance with Pope, Swift (with whom he lived for three months at Lord Peterborough's), and Gay, who first showed him the *Beggar's Oppora* before it was acted." He says he admired Swift, and loved Gay vastly.[7]

In the midst of all this uncertain criticism Gay seems not to have been disturbed. His easy-going disposition again asserted itself and he continued to prepare his opera for the stage. For once, an author was to prove himself a better judge of what he had contrived than his readers. Nevertheless, it is possible that Gay passively doubted, along with the rest, the success of his new experiment. Pope wrote

[4] In the sense of dilatory, according to Elwin.

[5] *Anecdotes,* p. 159.

[6] *Life of Johnson,* under date of 1775.

[7] *Voltaire's Visit to England,* pp. 105-106.

to Swift, in January, 1728, "At worst it is in its own nature a thing which he can lose no reputation by, as he lays none upon it." The motto of the play was, in fact, "Nos haec novimus esse nihil."

The Beggar's Opera was allowed to precede the *Dunciad,* although Pope's work was in full preparation and almost ready for the press. Neither Pope nor Swift wished to spoil the chances of a fair trial for Gay's new ballad opera. In the letter of January, 1728, already mentioned, Pope said:

> John Gay's opera is just on the point of delivery. It may be called, considering its subject, a jail-delivery. Mr. Congreve, with whom I have commemorated you, is anxious as to its success, and so am I. Whether it succeeds or not, it will make a great noise, but whether of claps or hisses I know not.

The piece was submitted to Cibber, rejected by him, taken to Rich, finally accepted by him, and then put in rehearsal. The story to the effect that Quin, the first actor selected for Macheath, resigned his part because, even after two rehearsals, he feared concerning the success of the piece,[8] may have no foundation. We may as well believe the other account of his giving up the part to Walker when the latter was discovered, by Gay, Rich, and Quin himself, to be better fitted for the singing and for representing the dashing highwayman.[9]

A unique step in the progress of the play, after it was in preparation at Lincoln's Inn Fields, was the introduction of a feature that was greatly to increase the popularity of the piece. Cooke relates the circumstance:

> To this Opera there was no music originally intended to accompany the songs, till Rich, the manager, suggested it on the second last rehearsal. The junto of wits, who regularly attended, one and all, objected to it; and it was given up till the Duchess of Queensbury (Gay's staunch patroness) accidentally hearing of it, attended herself the next rehearsal, when it was tried, and universally approved of.[10]

The ballad opera was a novelty, and this means of making it a full rival of the Italian productions had apparently been overlooked. At this point, possibly, Dr. Pepusch was called in to arrange the old tunes and also to write an overture.[11]

[8] *Life of Quin,* Supplement, p. 78.
[9] See *ante,* pp. 36-37.
[10] *Memoirs of Macklin,* p. 60.
[11] See *post,* p. 157.

The incident related by Cooke is perhaps responsible for a mistake which is seen several times in print. Dr. Doran seems to believe that to a regular comedy the songs were added, as if supplements to a finished play,[12] and Professor Brander Matthews asserts, "After the play was done, the songs were added, and the Beggar's Opera was submitted to the Manager of Drury Lane Theatre."[13] The fact surely is that, until the suggestion about accompaniments was made, the songs were intended to be sung without the orchestra. The songs are an integral part of the work, and must have been written, to a great extent, along with the dialogue. Gay had evidently selected the airs before he composed his lyrics, since the latter were made to fit the meter and rhythm of the ballad tunes.

An incident like the one just mentioned suggests that the play, which had been finished in October, 1727, but was not produced till January 29, 1728, may have undergone an interesting evolution. The disposal of the manuscript, changes, delays, conferences, and rehearsals must have kept Gay busy during November, December, and January. When once the cast was picked, however, and the piece was settled in its final form, the dramatist's difficulties ceased, and thenceforth a career of good fortune attended *The Beggar's Opera*.

[12] *Annals of Stage*, 263.
[13] *Harper's Magazine*, LX, 501.

CHAPTER XII

THE FIRST BALLAD OPERA

IT is an assured fact that the type of drama known as ballad opera was first given to the stage by Gay in his Newgate comedy with songs. By ballad opera is meant, for the purpose of this discussion, an opera which makes use mainly of old ballad airs, instead of specially composed music. It should also be understood that *The Beggar's Opera* was not the first comic opera in English, strictly speaking, for works like D'Urfey's *Wonders in the Sun* (1706) and *The Two Queens of Brentford* (1721) had preceded it in that field. If a musical play like *The Beggar's Opera* appeared on the English stage before 1728 there are no traces of it; and at any rate Gay's piece fixed the form and started the development of a new species of dramatic literature. It is not necessary here to point out the beginnings of English opera, serious or comic, but only the origin of ballad opera, as a distinct type that came into prominence at the appearance of *The Beggar's Opera,* and was preserved for over a quarter of a century in numerous literary descendants.

Ramsay's *The Gentle Shepherd,* originally published in 1725, at first glance seems a close forerunner of *The Beggar's Opera.* It has songs to old tunes, mixed with the dialogue. The fact, however, that it is a pastoral drama in verse, seriously romantic, prevents it from being an ordinary ballad opera, or one of a comic character. It is entirely different in spirit and treatment from *The Beggar's Opera* or the average piece written under the influence of the Newgate musical comedy. Theophilus Cibber, the author of *Patie and Peggy,* which followed Gay's success (in April, 1730), says, in speaking of his adaptation of *The Gentle Shepherd,* that he was induced "to turn it into a *Ballad Opera.*" Thus Ramsay's play, though it came near to founding a type, was not considered the pioneer ballad opera in any respect. It was first written without songs, the lyrics being interpolated as a secondary development. Though very popular in print, it was not acted till 1729, the year after the production of *The Beggar's*

Opera. Hence it could have had little dramatic or theatrical influence upon a piece of 1728. Gay may possibly have caught an idea from *The Gentle Shepherd,* but he alone is certain to deserve the credit of giving a new model to the English stage. *The Beggar's Opera*—a real play, and not, as in the case of the Scottish work, a poem pure and simple, hardly adapted for representation—must with justice be considered the first ballad opera.

Since its introduction with D'Avenant's *The Siege of Rhodes* (1656), English opera had been largely serious. It exhibited a blending of masque and heroic drama. Except for certain instances of burlesque or comedies with songs, light opera did not fully come into fashion until 1728. It remained for Rich, after he had once securely established pantomimes, with their harlequinade, at Lincoln's Inn Fields, to introduce, by the ingenuity of Gay, another rival to the legitimate drama. Ballad opera furnished the novelty he sought, and it was the force of lucky circumstances that made him the sponsor of the new-made musical comedy. The gradual trend toward ballad opera is not wholly obscure. Shakespearean and other standard comedies, transformed into "dramatick operas," had retained their former characteristics, with a touch of new romance and heroic drama thrown in. From such sources of English comic opera, writers like D'Urfey had pointed in the direction of the plan later perfected by Gay. Pantomime, also, absolutely disregarding stage traditions, and leading away from the masque and heroic opera, both of which it was ready to burlesque, contributed its influence in breaking the path for ballad opera.

External evidence indicates that Gay had here presented something new. Cibber says: "After the vast Success of that new Species of Dramatick Poetry, the Beggar's Opera; the Year following I was so stupid, as to attempt something of the same Kind."[1] Hitchcock says *The Beggar's Opera* "was in a stile of composition which had not hitherto been tried, and concerning which, the public opinion was therefore more difficult to ascertain."[2] Victor speaks of it as a "new Species of Dramatic Poetry."[3] The early papers usually refer to the piece as a play or comedy, not as an opera, the comic type of which

[1] *Apology,* Chapter VII. He refers to his ballad opera, *Love in a Riddle.*
[2] *Irish Stage,* I, 40 (1788).
[3] *Hist. of Stage,* II, 153 (1761).

was new. Dr. Johnson, in his own peculiar style, gives Gay the credit of inventing the ballad opera form:[4]

> He had not in any great degree the *mens divinior,* the dignity of genius. Much, however, must be allowed to the author of a new species of composition, though it be not of the highest kind. We owe to Gay the Ballad Opera; a mode of comedy which was at first supposed to delight only by its novelty, but has now by the experience of half a century been found so well accommodated to the disposition of a popular audience that it is likely to keep long possession of the stage. Whether this new drama was the product of the judgement or of luck the praise of it must be given to the inventor; and there are many writers read with more reverence to whom such merit of originality cannot be attributed.

Joseph Warton calls *The Beggar's Opera* "the parent of that most monstrous of all dramatic absurdities, the Comic Opera";[5] and Genest wishes it had never been written because it introduced comic opera into England. No earlier ballad operas are mentioned in the advertisements before 1728, and the accounts of the first night's performance indicate that the audience was puzzled over this new dramatic riddle. Even Gay's close friends seemed doubtful about the success of the experiment,—the more so, perhaps, after the refusal at Drury Lane. As to the critics, they had no standards for comparison. Gay's piece was neither comedy nor tragedy, and certainly not an opera in the usual sense. *The Beggar's Opera* was therefore recognized as a new form of stage entertainment, and hence became the sign of the species.[6]

Internal evidence supports this idea of novelty of form. As acted and as printed, with the music, the play exhibits a departure from customary modes of dramatic structure and style. In this pioneer position it stands really not as an opera at all, but as a comedy interspersed with many songs which quickly balance the dialogue and turn the piece into a singing play. The speeches are not merely an excuse for the songs; both go together to build up the plot. Thus, in contrast to the contemporary Italian opera and the English serious opera, *The Beggar's Opera* stands almost as one extreme of the regular drama which introduces one song or more, as in Shakespeare or Congreve. The distinct achievement of Gay appears to have been

[4] *Lives of English Poets* (Gay).

[5] *Essay on Pope.*

[6] See original review from *Daily Journal,* quoted *ante,* p. 6.

his happy thought of mingling many songs, mainly to old ballad tunes, with the scenes of an ordinary comedy. He had approached his success through several attempts at something of a similar kind, if we may take fragments of *The Mohawks, The Wife of Bath,* and *The What d'ye Call It* as touches of ballad opera.

What led Gay to adopt this dramatic form, if it was not sudden inspiration, without any development of ideas, was possibly the scheme of opposing Italian opera by the very logical plan of using native music as an antidote. The dramatist, with his apparent love of balladry, was quick to recognize the power of simple English melody to rival foreign affectation and ornamentation in music. In such a process he may have discovered a new type, the far-reaching influence of which was not even considered. As the editor of *Modern English Drama,* 1811, remarks:

> In ridicule of the then prevailing taste for the Italian stage, Gay composed his celebrated Beggar's Opera; but the author, while it was only his intention to satirize what he deemed stiff and unnatural in the Opera, presented the public with a new and popular species of Drama, happily adapted to the taste of the nation.[7]

If the author should be blamed, as Warton and Genest imply, for every possible successor in the way of musical comedy, he is at the same time to be praised for furnishing a freshening influence upon English drama as a whole, and helping to give to English folk music its proper valuation.

Gay's operatic title, aside from its correctness in connection with the new ballad type, should be considered in the light of its burlesque of the Italian musical drama. The author must not be supposed to have seriously attempted "an Opera in all its forms."[8] Fielding and some other later dramatists rightly called their musical plays ballad farces. *The Beggar's Opera* was designated in various ways as the styles of musical comedy changed. In the second half of the century it was frequently labeled as a comic opera, and even given the occasional names of pasticcio and burletta. However it was called, the play continued to be more prosperous than its imitators, both on the stage and in print, no doubt largely because of the originality of its composition. Dr. Burney says:

[7] Vol. V, Preface.

[8] See the next chapter for a discussion of this point.

The *Beggar's Opera* . . . forms a memorable epoch in our national Music: for though not a single new air was composed for this pasticcio in our vulgar tongue, it has proved the best Opera to the patentees of our playhouses that ever was brought on the stage. The morality and the Music are equally intelligible and acceptable to the galleries; and a favourite singer can always fill the rest of the house.[9]

This was written as late as 1789. *The Beggar's Opera* seems to have achieved a triumph mainly on account of, and certainly to the advantage of, the ballad opera form.

[9] *Hist. of Music,* IV, 650.

LAVINIA FENTON, AS POLLY PEACHUM

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CHAPTER XIII

THE ATTACK ON ITALIAN OPERA

ONE of the chief features of *The Beggar's Opera* during the original season was its satire and burlesque of Italian opera. While it is true that rivalry of the foreign production was the principal thing, Gay's intention of ridiculing the affectation and ornamentation of Italian music and its usual libretto must not be overlooked. It does not matter that the author did not attempt to cast his opera in the customary classical form; satire and burlesque do not necessarily imply close imitation.

In 1728 Italian opera was firmly settled as a popular fashion. People of all ranks, especially the nobility and gentry, flocked to hear the foreign compositions, as well as English pieces in a similar style. At the expense of legitimate drama they had supported a costly institution which was becoming daily a heavier burden and had begun to destroy, among certain classes, all taste for native balladry and song. If they had not been entirely won over by foreign music, they had at least forgotten their own for a time. Even Rich, at his theatre in Lincoln's Inn Fields, had been active in the production of Italian opera against which he was later to oppose *The Beggar's Opera.*

The first opera in England of the Italian type, *Arsinoe,* was brought out in 1705. It was followed by *Camilla,* with equal success. As early as 1706, according to Busby, the partiality for Italian music had grown so much that *The Temple of Love,* staged by Congreve and Vanbrugh, at the Haymarket, failed because it had German music.[1] The same writer remarks, "Even Durfey's *Wonders in the Sun, or Kingdom of the Birds,* did not . . . escape the condemnation thought to be due to a piece, the melodies of which were of mere English growth." He adds that

> operas, whether they were English or Italian, and whether the music, so it were thought to be Italian, was excellent or despicable, . . . were encouraged, and

[1] *Hist. of Music,* p. 417, note.

became so formidable to the English actors, that in 1707, a subscription was opened "for the better support of the comedians acting in the Haymarket, and to enable them to keep the diversion of plays under a separate interest from operas."

The musical entertainments, however, continued to hold their own. In 1710 such pieces as *Almahide,* the first one wholly in Italian, and *Hydaspes* were presented. This was the year in which Handel arrived in England.

The appearance of Handel greatly stimulated the new Italian opera. In 1711 he produced *Rinaldo,* which had a run of almost four months. During the closely succeeding years many experiments were tried to perfect Italian opera and increase its influence and popularity. Between 1717 and 1720, nevertheless, owing to the great cost of production and the feeble support, operas were abandoned temporarily. It was in 1720 that Handel undertook his enterprise of putting Italian opera on a permanent basis in England. In this he had the support of royalty and the nobility. A new fund was established and with it the Royal Academy of Music. Then came a direct line of operas in that one year: *Numitore, Radamisto,* written by Handel especially for the new scheme, *Narciso,* and *Astarto.* In the next few years Handel's compositions alternated with pieces by writers who were not well known. Operas that closely preceded *The Beggar's Opera* were Handel's *Admetus* (January, 1727), Bononcini's *Astyanax* (May, 1727), and Handel's *Ricardo Primo* (October, 1727).

Thus Italian opera, often under grave difficulties, managed to keep going and developed a considerable following. One trouble was its aristocracy. Hawkins says, "The opera was an entertainment calculated for the better sort of people of this country."[2] With so narrow a foundation, it was naturally ready to yield to the triumph of *The Beggar's Opera.* Perhaps the democratic ballad play found here much of its chance for travesty of the dignity and formality of the favorite plaything of the upper classes. Hitchcock thus describes the situation that preceded the satire of *The Beggar's Opera:*[3]

That exotic species of entertainment called Italian Operas, had for several years been rising into fashion, and at that time entirely engrossed the attention

[2] *Hist. of Music,* V, 158.

[3] *Irish Stage,* I, 40-41.

of the higher and more fashionable ranks of people. The seduction of foreign music, the novelty of those unnatural warblers then imported, the charms of dancing, with the glare of decorations, had bewitched the fancy, and diverted the tide of encouragement, and applause, from the more rational, though less gaudy representations of the English theatre. This corruption of public taste, and perversion of judgment, it was Mr. Gay's intention, by humorously satirizing, to correct.

Gay's own early comment on the reigning fashion of Italian opera is highly interesting, and, in view of his later attack, quite significant as a source of literary motive. In a letter to Swift, February 3, 1723, he engages in delightful ridicule:

As for the reigning amusements of the town, it is entirely music; real fiddles, bass-viols and hautboys; not poetical harps, lyres and reeds. There's nobody allowed to say, I sing, but an eunuch or an Italian woman. Everybody is grown now as great a judge of music, as they were in your time of poetry, and folks that could not distinguish one tune from another now daily dispute about the different styles of Handel, Bononcine, and Attilio. People have now forgot Homer and Virgil and Caesar, or at least they have lost their ranks. For in London and Westminster, in all polite conversations, Senesino is daily voted to be the greatest man that ever lived.

There were many, however, who did not sympathize with the usurpation of Italian opera. It is a noteworthy fact that the newspapers, in general, favored English music. The papers of the opposition party may have been hitting indirectly at the patronage of the foreign product by the court. Throughout the early rivalry between English stage pieces of any type and Italian opera, patriotism had as much to do with the antagonism toward the latter as did regard for dramatic literature. Few chances to satirize or burlesque the exotic species were lost. Many a prominent writer took an occasional thrust. It is possible that *The Beggar's Opera* succeeded so fully because of this spirit aroused against anything not English. Surely the idea of a new attack would have been the best advertising in the world.

An early dramatic burlesque of Italian opera was Richard Estcourt's *Prunella,* acted at Drury Lane in 1708, though undated in print. This piece has verse dialogue, parted for occasional songs. The ideas are common, probably to be sung in a grand style. The names of Italian opera airs are sometimes given, including those of *Arsinoe*

and *Camilla*. Possibly these two prominent early operas are especially attacked.

Of the well-known authors who opposed the opera in public print, Addison and Steele were probably the most prominent and most severe. Several papers in the *Spectator* express their views plainly.[4] Dr. Burney says the antagonism of both writers "toward Italian opera is unjust and guided generally by self-interest and national prejudice." Addison went so far as to write an English opera in direct opposition to the Italian. His *Rosamond* was produced in the spring of 1707, but lasted only three nights, and accomplished little of its intended task. Of course Addison had no taste for music, and perhaps for that reason he failed to accomplish what Gay was able to do easily with his ballad opera.

When Nicolini, one of the opera singers, returned to Italy after his first visit to England, the following verses were printed in Steele's *Miscellany* (1714):

> Begon, our Nation's Pleasure and Reproach!
> *Britain* no more with idle Trills debauch;
> Back to thy own unmanly *Venice* sail,
> Where luxury and loose Desires prevail;
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Hence with thy Curst deluding Song! away!
> Shall British Freedom thus become thy Prey?
> Freedom which we so dearly us'd to Prize,
> We scorn'd to yield it—But to *British* Eyes.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Nonsense grew pleasing by his *Syren* Arts,
> And stole from *Shakespear's* self our easie Hearts.

Of course *The Beggar's Opera* helped to crowd out Shakespeare, too, but in a different manner, and to another purpose.

John Hughes protested that

> Lull'd statesmen melt away their drowsy cares
> Of England's safety in Italian airs.

He is supposed to have written several cantatas, set by Dr. Pepusch, "to oppose or exclude the Italian opera, an exotick and irrational

[4] See especially Nos. 5, 13, 18, and 29.

entertainment, which has been always combated and always has prevailed."[5]

The statement of the *Dunciad* note as to how *The Beggar's Opera* did what John Dennis, by the labors of a lifetime, was not able to accomplish[6] has reference to the repeated efforts of the critic to get the English people to renounce the Italian opera. That entertainment, he had said, in Italy is "a beautiful harmonious Monster, but here in *England* 'tis an ugly howling one."[7] Several quotations from his *Essay on Opera* (1706) are significant. He believes "the Italian Opera, another Entertainment which is about to be establish'd in the room of Plays, is a Diversion of more pernicious Consequence, than the most licentious Play that ever has appear'd upon the Stage." He mentions "that soft and effeminate Musick which abounds in Italian Opera." He defends the English stage so that "the English Arts may not be vanquish'd and oppress'd at home by the Invasion of Foreign Luxury." According to his idea "there is something in the *Italian* Opera which is Barbarous and Gothick, and so contrary to a true Taste, that an Opera in any Country can be only advanc'd by the same Degrees that the Taste of Men is debauched for more generous Arts."[8] The difficulty here was that Dennis did not adopt the proper way to stop the evil against which he so vigorously preached. *The Beggar's Opera* brought a pleasing remedy; and by its merry drollery and waggishness really did accomplish in one season what the critics, as well as the writers of heroic and sentimental drama, in straight rivalry with Italian opera, had tried to do for many years.

Allan Ramsay's *Tea-Table Miscellany* (1724) contains a song called "Lucky Nansy," with this plain language:

> While fops in soft Italian verse,
> Ilk fair ane's e'en and breast rehearse,
> While sangs abound and sense is scarce,
> These lines I have indited.

This sort of opinion was held by Colley Cibber, who said of some lines in Lee's *Alexander the Great* that the multitude listened to them enraptured, and "no more desired sense to them than our musical

[5] Johnson's *Lives of English Poets* (Hughes).

[6] See *post*, p. 150.

[7] *Select Works*, I, 468.

[8] These quotations are found in *Select Works*, I, 447, 450, 453, and 467.

connoisseurs think it essential in the celebrated airs of an Italian opera."[9] Such sentiments probably represent the attitude of many others.

The Hive, a collection of songs published in 1725, prints a poem "To Seignora Cuzzoni,"[10] on her return to Italy:

> Little Syren of the stage,
> Charmer of an idle age;
> Empty warbler, breathing lyre,
> Wanton gale of fond desire;
> Bane of ev'ry manly art,
> Sweet enfeebler of the heart;
> Oh, too pleasing is thy strain,
> Hence, to southern climes again;
> Tuneful mischief, vocal spell,
> To this island bid farewell;
> Leave us, as we ought to be,
> Leave the Britons, rough and free.

In 1727 appeared a dramatic skit called *The English Stage Italianiz'd.* The author explains it as "A Tragi-Comedy, after the *Italian* Manner; by way of Essay, or first Step towards the farther Improvement of the *English* Stage." In the introduction he says, "You are not insensible to what a pitch of Perfection we have already brought the *Italian* Opera here in *England.*" He speaks of "those delightful *Italian* Airs, which are now so common, that the very Shoe Boys, sing *Non e si Vagoe Bello,* at the Corner of every Street." He indulges in good satire about bringing "our Tragedy and Comedy to the same Perfection!" and the abolishing of "our oldfashion'd Stuff." He talks of the time when "the *Italian* Language is either totally introduc'd in *England,* or the *English* Tongue taught to *Italian* Comedians"; and of "no Man but myself having the Secret of *Italianizing* the *English* Stage." The sketch itself is a harlequin performance of five acts, with no dialogue and nothing but stage directions. At the end of the piece is an "Advertisement" which begins: "For the Benefit of the English Quality, and others who have forgot their Mother-Tongue, This Play is translating into Italian by an able Hand."

It remained for *The Beggar's Opera* to complete the work of all these forerunners of the Italian opposition. The time was indeed

[9] *Apology,* Chapter IV.
[10] By Ambrose Philips.

ripe for a final blow, and Gay's opera, if it did not kill the rival species of stage entertainment, at least severely crippled it and liberated the public from its spell. By substituting the powerful antidote of familiar English music Gay was able to render the foreign musical drama unnecessary. The play thus became a satire against the operatic institution and the passion for Italian sing-song, as well as against the opera itself, in any certain form. The very act of offering the public over threescore British airs was something of a thrust at Italian opera, with its fine frills and decorations.

The scheme fell naturally into Gay's hands. Living in an age which relished keenly any satire or burlesque, he had himself, by talent, the ability to ridicule in the best of humor the absurdities of Italian opera. Literary ridicule was not new to him; he had practiced it in plays and poems before 1728. Even if his main object was novelty, he could not miss the chance to score a hit at something much protested against by many Englishmen. It was safe ground that Gay was treading on when he directed his attack, and no cover was needed to protect the author. The effort was destined to be at least temporarily successful, for the multitude, at once admiring the kind of songs it had always really liked, had its eyes opened and was enabled to see once more the virtues of native art.

It is possible, of course, that Gay had a personal grudge against Italian opera because it was much patronized by royalty and nobility, and that therefore he took satisfaction in breaking the idol of those from whom he had not received the favors he desired. As to Rich, who had produced Italian opera for a good many years, he could have had no further object than staging a profitable rival of the foreign musical drama. His declining of the manuscript, at the first, suggests that he did not consider the music a prominent feature. From some quarters come reports of his contempt for music and singing actors. The manager of Lincoln's Inn Fields was seeking merely to please the public, and he was willing enough, after the victory of 1728, to turn again to the production of Italian opera.

If one cares to satisfy himself as to the real evidences of Gay's satire against Italian opera and its methods, let him look at the contemporary and other eighteenth-century opinions on the subject. Such external information is fair proof of the general attitude in 1728. There are dozens of references to *The Beggar's Opera* as a

satire or burlesque on Italian opera, only a few of which are given here. The most important early utterance in this connection is that of Swift, in the third number of the *Intelligencer,* 1728. Toward the end of his article the Dean says:

> This comedy likewise exposeth with great Justice, that unnatural Taste for Italian music among us, which is wholly unsuited to our northern climate, and the Genius of our people, whereby we are overrun with Italian effeminacy, and Italian nonsense. An old gentleman said to me, that many years ago when the Practice of an unnatural Vice grew so frequent in London, that Many were Prosecuted for it, he was sure it would be a forerunner of Italian operas, and Singers; and then we should want nothing but Stabbing and Poisoning to make us perfect Italians.

The author of *Thievery A-la-Mode,* a pamphlet published in June, 1728,[11] calls *The Beggar's Opera*

> as certainly it was intended by the Author, a Satyr on the Inconsistencies and unnatural Conduct of the Italian Operas, which tho' they charm the Eye with gay Dresses, and fine Scenes, and delight the Ear with Sound, have nothing in them either to reform the Manners, or improve the Mind, the original institution of the Stage.[12]

Later writers frequently refer to the intended satire or burlesque. Dr. Johnson says the play was "written in ridicule of the musical Italian drama."[13] This statement probably has been given wide circulation, and is responsible for many more of the same kind, as in the *Biographia Dramatica,* or Oxberry's *Dramatic Biography,* where we find the same wording exactly. Johnson, however, was close enough to the original season to be a fair interpreter of the facts in the case. The author of the *Dramatic Censor,* F. Gentleman, writing in 1770 at length about *The Beggar's Opera,*[14] shows one opinion of that time regarding the purpose of satire:

> As Italian operas depend a good deal on dancing merit, we find Gay has a stroke even at that, by introducing a hop among the Newgate-gentry, to which, by way of making a strange, yet satirical medley, the condemned hole immediately succeeds.

[11] See *post,* p. 234.

[12] For a positive opinion of 1745, see the quotation from the *London Magazine,* printed *post,* p. 155.

[13] *Lives of English Poets* (Gay).

[14] Vol. I. For another reference by this same author to burlesque of Italian opera, see *post,* p. 251.

In 1781 George Keate's *Preludio* to Colman's reversal of the opera took the original satire for granted. The *Biographia Dramatica* records the speech of the Beggar "that as the *Beggar's Opera* originally owed its existence to the 'feminine' rage for Italian Operas, such a risible travestie [as the *Preludio*] could not fail of heightening the satirical burlesque." Writing at the very end of the century, Kirkman, in his *Memoirs of Macklin* (1799), says:[15]

> By this piece, it is evident, that *Mr. Gay* was resolved to exercise his unbounded talent for satire against those unessential exotics—*Italian Operas*. The author, too, called in music to his aid; and the very title of the Opera was intended to convey a bitter sarcasm on men of fortune and public taste, for the unmerited penury, and even contempt, that persons of most excellent talents and genius have frequently experienced in this country.[16]

One of the most significant commentaries on the subject is found in the explanatory leaflet issued by the English company in the recent American revival of *The Beggar's Opera:*

> Whenever possible, the methods and mannerisms of the Italian Opera of the time were parodied.
>
> In the present production the same idea has been preserved, more noticeably in the first act. Each song is preceded and ended by a curtsey in the case of the ladies and by a bow from the men. The singer advances to the front of the stage and the remaining characters retire, to come to the front again when the number is over.
>
> Also, in the first act the producer has attempted to keep the old-fashioned triangle formation; each player moving in straight lines and taking acute angles whenever possible.

If we look for internal evidence, we find several things to indicate that Gay, though not undertaking a burlesque of the whole Italian opera form, or any particular opera, included distinct features which would suggest parody on a typical opera and satire against the institution as developed in England. The fact that such features are specifically pointed out in the Introduction of the Beggar and the Player is proof of the intention of the author to ridicule the foreign musical drama. If his purpose was merely rivalry through novelty, how can we explain the title, the Introduction, with its direct raillery at opera, and a part of the structure of the play itself? To rival the Italian

[15] I, 239.

[16] An additional opinion on the subject of operatic burlesque will be found *post*, p. 254.

opera had been the task of many plays, and equal failure had resulted. Gay succeeded, on the contrary, by ridiculing, through unusual devices, the entertainment with which he sought to compete. In a word, he had the happy thought to out-opera the opera itself.

In drawing up a plan which did not require a piece cast in the customary Italian mould, Gay devised a type of English opera wholly new, but more like the previous English opera than like the Italian model. Dryden and his contemporaries had meant by opera "a drama that is declaimed or spoken, and in which songs and symphonies are introduced; differing from real opera, where there is no speaking, and where the narrative part and dialogue is set to recitative."[17] It was not necessary for Gay to indulge in a close burlesque of the absurdities of contemporary Italian opera to get his effect. By brief suggestion he could point a broader attack. His corrective agents were English, rather than pseudo-Italian. A waggish operatic name, an introductory chat with the audience, a few keen items of burlesque, and English ballads by the score,—these were the sharp tools with which he ventured to cut away the bonds of a worshipful allegiance to foreign music. Other attacks, before and afterwards, were weak parodies on the Italian operatic structure and the Italian style of singing. Gay, with much originality, chose for his fable and incidents the low-life comedy (or mock-tragedy) of Newgate. To replace the elaborate business of Italian opera he offered his simple scenes and characters. To the lofty and extravagant language of opera he opposed the everyday gossip of thieves and prostitutes, with their sentiments at times heightened to poetry and deep philosophy. In this way he could poke fun at the serious, elevated opera at every turn, if followers of the latter were willing to make the comparisons suggested by the Introduction. It is true that, aside from the Introduction, *The Beggar's Opera* may also be considered an ordinary comedy with songs; but in the light of the Introduction it becomes a great deal more than that. Gay may have composed such a prologue as an afterthought, since his plan was not limited to an exposure of Italian opera, but it now stands as an integral part of the play.

Regardless of the fact that some writers have been unable to find "the slightest internal evidence in *The Beggar's Opera* of any inten-

[17] Burney, *Hist. of Music*, IV, 191.

tion to burlesque or ridicule the Italian Opera,"[18] the Introduction is full of satirical hints. The Beggar tells the Player that his piece was written to celebrate the marriage of "two most excellent Ballad-Singers." Gay shows here that he needs no high origin for his new brand of opera, just as he needs no characters from high life. This entertainment has been performed at the "great Room at *St. Giles's.*" At any rate it is clearly not a *Courtier's Opera.* Next, the Beggar mentions his use of the "Similes that are in all your celebrated *Operas:* The *Swallow,* the *Moth,* the *Bee,* the *Ship,* the *Flower,* &c." Many others are found in the play, in the songs and outside. While it cannot be said that all the similes were used for burlesque, a large number were surely inserted to heighten the parody effect. Such figures as the following are typical: p. 6, "like the golden Oar"; p. 10, "frozen as Ice"; p. 18, "The Miser thus"; p. 22, "Like the Notes of a Fiddle"; p. 38, "like the Fox"; p. 42, "like a shotten Herring"; p. 47, "like a Skiff"; and p. 58, "like the Turk." Many of the figures are metaphors, as on p. 7, "Rope of thy Life"; p. 47, "Seas of Delight"; p. 56, "my Courage is out"; and p. 53, "that dread Thunder allay." Single figures are often extended through a whole speech or song. Aside from these detachable specimens, there are what might be called the extensive figures of *our gang, other people,* and the *court.*

The Beggar follows up his account of the similes with mention of his "Prison Scene which the Ladies always reckon charmingly pathetick." Here is an undoubted allusion to the scenes of Italian operas, as well as some of sentimental English drama. Even Sir John Hawkins, who denies, in general, all burlesque of Italian opera, suggests that possibly Macheath's appearance in Newgate fetters might be supposed to ridicule the prison scene in *Coriolanus,* performed a few years before.[19] Many people in 1728, perhaps, did take Gay's prison scene as charmingly pathetic, just as some who took the piece too seriously did in every period of its history. The Beggar's next consideration is the leading female characters: "As to the Parts, I have observ'd such a nice Impartiality to our two Ladies, that it is impossible for either of them to take Offence." This seems to have no bearing on Polly and Lucy, but it is clearly a reference to the quarrel

[18] Pearce, *Polly Peachum,* p. 15.

[19] *Hist. of Music,* V, 315.

between two rival singers, Cuzzoni and Faustina, in 1727, over the leading part in an Italian opera. The audience of that time could be trusted to appreciate any parallelism in the deadly strife of the two girls over Macheath. The controversy of the two Italian women had caused persons of fashion to take sides, much to the confusion of the opera management. The newspapers were full of the dispute, pictures of the favorites were sold, and the rival factions continued to publish satirical verses up to the very time of *The Beggar's Opera*. Thus there was the most favorable opportunity to transfer such a quarrel to the comic stage, especially since the source was Italian opera.

In the next place, the Beggar apologizes for not making his "Opera throughout unnatural, like those in vogue; for I have no Recitative: Excepting this, as I have consented to have neither Prologue nor Epilogue, it must be allow'd an Opera in all its forms." This is an open thrust at Italian operas, in the broadest ridicule. Gay, in contrast, made his opera very natural, indeed, with the homeliest realism, both in speech and scene; and he had the very opposite of recitative,—straight dialogue and songs. Even if he omitted the customary dramatic prologue and epilogue in order to conform to the opera type, he furnished an excellent substitute in the Introduction and in the final scene of the Beggar and the Player. The waggishness of the Introduction is indicated by the Beggar's statement that, aside from the omission of recitative, his piece "must be allow'd an Opera in all its forms." The overture is another appropriate aid to imitation, and is well announced through the last speech of the Introduction—a rather knavish method of calling attention to a leading earmark of operatic art. In substance it may contain a slight satire on Italian music. Dr. Pepusch, to keep up the spirit of Gay's English balladry, took one of the simple old melodies of the text, "One Evening, having lost my Way," and embellished it, perhaps to suggest regular operatic style.

In the final scene of the Beggar and the Player there is more to prove Gay's ridicule of operatic methods. The absurd conclusion shows that it is, indeed, only an opera. If, for a happy ending, a foolish shift from tragedy to comedy is demanded, it must be arranged, "for an Opera must end happily." The change is easily made, because, in Gay's phrase, "in this kind of Drama, 'tis no matter how absurdly things are brought about." The Player admits

that they must "comply with the Taste of the Town." It is for this reason that Macheath is "brought back to his Wives in Triumph." Such a scene appears to be meant for a satire on the conventional happy endings of both Italian opera and English sentimental comedy. There can be no reason whatever for a reprieve, because the hero highwayman, unless in operatic style, cannot suddenly be found innocent under his charge. Were there no parody hints in the body of the play, judging by this final scene alone we might say, with Dr. Johnson, that *The Beggar's Opera* ridiculed the Italian musical drama. The two scenes of the Beggar and the Player together explain the purpose of the opera, and reflect satire and burlesque upon passages in the main text which might otherwise pass unnoticed.

After the Beggar-Player dialogues have shown the extent of the satire, it is easy to locate in the whole play frequent passages which seem intended to carry out the attack on Italian opera. Such internal evidence may be found in the medley of ten songs,[20] a mass of changing airs, the sum of which amounts to burlesque of opera recitative. This device is especially significant. Here the action of the plot is advanced rapidly by monologue to music, after the fashion of Italian sing-song. That the airs were "rumbled over by Macheath" we learn from Watts' preface to the first edition of the music alone.[21] One of these airs, "Why are mine Eyes still flowing," on its own statement in the original version,[22] is in direct imitation of the Italian manner of singing. In addition, some of the duets, made by dividing old ballad tunes, seem parodies on Italian opera styles. Gay thus gets a sort of recitative without any undesirable effect. Such songs as "Were I laid on Greenland's Coast," p. 17; "I'm bubbled," p. 36; "Why how now, Madam Flirt?", p. 37; "Hither, dear Husband," p. 51; and "Would I might be hang'd," p. 56, are good examples. Dialogue is found in some of the original ballads, but the use of it in the play would suggest a different parody. Whenever Gay's characters stood and sang at each other, the audience had a chance for direct comparisons with Italian practice.

In general, the old English airs, which give tone to the various scenes, furnish additional material for satire and burlesque. Familiar

[20] Act III, Sc. xiii.

[21] London, 1728.

[22] See *post*, Appendix section II.

tunes adapted to the story of the play, in both merry and pathetic moods, do the work of specially prepared operatic music, either English or Italian. Simple ballad airs, instead of prolonged recitative, must have furnished a notable contemporary contrast. For the important burlesque moments, doleful, serious, or sentimental airs are invariably employed. Some of these actually suggest the emotional climax of an aria. The more nearly Gay parodied or adapted the old ballads which everyone knew, the better the force of his opposition could be directed. Hitchcock comments on Gay's use of elegant language in the midst of a low-plane comedy, an obvious take-off, especially in the songs, on conventional opera, with its fine phrases and foreign setting: "The same loftiness of stile, and unnecessary flow of forced similes, which, from an Italian hero, gave such delight, when put in the mouths of sharpers and highwaymen, could not fail to produce an effect as ludicrous, as the former had been grand."[23] Finally, to those who had been music-mad, in their fashionable patronage of the foreign compositions, Polly's speech to Lucy, "Sure there is nothing so charming as Musick! I'm fond of it to distraction!" a peculiar thought in a sober setting, must have come as a gentle reproof.

Even if *The Beggar's Opera* were not a satire against the Italian musical drama, we should have to consider that it had at least the effect of one. It either laughed the opera off the stage for that season, or, as a permanent attraction, forced its competitor to yield to its success, the general effect being the same. It gave the opera a setback from which it did not fully recover for several years. Gay's comedy was looked upon as a satire by most writers after 1728 and its effectiveness in behalf of native music and against the Italian is often described in forceful terms. A few quotations from early materials, arranged chronologically, will illustrate.

The *Craftsman* for February 17, 1728, heralded the success of Gay's piece and the decline of the Italian productions:

> We hear that the *British Opera,* commonly called the *Beggar's Opera,* continues to be acted, at the Theatre in Lincoln's-Inn Fields with general Applause, to the great Mortification of the Performers and Admirers of the *Outlandish Opera* in the Haymarket.

[23] *Irish Stage.*

Gay wrote to Swift on February 15, 1728:

> Lord Cobham says that I should have printed it [*The Beggar's Opera*] in Italian over against the English, that the ladies might have understood what they read. The outlandish, as they now call it, opera has been so thin of late that some have called that the Beggar's Opera, and if the run continues, I fear I shall have remonstrances drawn up against me by the Royal Academy of Music.

Gay's letter to Swift, on March 20, 1728, contains another reference to the influence of his piece against the Italian opera,—"there is a discourse about the town, that the directors of the Royal Academy of Music design to solicit against its being played on the outlandish opera days, as it is now called."

Dr. Arbuthnot's letter to the *Daily Journal,* March 23, 1728, indicates the reception and effect of Gay's musical comedy less than two months after its first appearance:

> I take *The Beggar's Opera* to be the touchstone to try the British taste on, and it has accordingly proved effectual in discovering our true inclinations, which, how artfully soever they may be disguised by a childish fondness for Italian poetry and music in preference to our own, will in one way or another start up and disclose themselves.

The *Daily Journal* for April 10, 1728, contains a poem called "The Competition; Or, Rival Opera's. To the Tune of, *A Soldier and a Sailor &c.*" This tells of the strife between Cuzzoni and Faustina, and relates how Apollo thought the time was opportune

> To try the Taste Sublime, Sir,
> Which *Britain's* Courtiers claim.

The god descends, but both singers charm him, as they do the crowd.

> The God incens'd to Fury,
> At such a Rabble-Jury,
> Swore *Britain's* St—rs and G—ters,
> Not fit to judge 'tween Carters,
> While whistling for a Ring,
> And such to prove their Taste, Sir,
> Dispatch'd an Imp in Haste, Sir,
> Who dress'd up Mimick Folly,
> Calling the Phantom Polly,
> And set the Minx to sing.

The wanton tun'd her Voice, Sir;
Such vulgar Strains her Choice, Sir,
As erst blind Bards did labour,
On Bagpipes, Fife and Tabor,
At Country Fair or Wake.
The Judges cease their Squall, Sir,
Let Party-Fury fall, Sir;
While each enamour'd Ninny,
Declar'd, with Buss and Guinea,
She'd won the Rival Stake.

In the "Letters in Prose and Verse, To . . . Polly Peachum," 1728, is a poem called "*A Challenge from* C – – – oni *and* F – – – na, *to* Polly Peachum," containing these lines:

We rival Queens in Interest now combine;
Unite our flying Troops to ruin thine.
Think not to scream Us from this happy Isle,
Tho' Ladies, Peers, and Coblers on you smile.

The title-page of *A Trip through London*, published in 1728,[24] lists "An Account of the surprizing Revolution at the Theatre in the *Hay-Market*, and the wonderful happy Deliverance of these Nations from *Popish Italian* Songs, and Common Sense. By *Jack G—y*, *Tom W—lk—r*, and *Moll Fent—n*." This piece, though called for, is not included in the contents.

North, in his *Memoires of Musick*, written in 1728, comments on the growth of Italian opera in England and the rather doubtful substitute for it in *The Beggar's Opera*.[25] He says "we cannot wonder, that among the courters of musick an Itallian taste should prevaile." Corelli's work had been brought to England, and English young men had traveled in Italy, affecting to learn of Corelli, and had almost "dispeopled Itally of viollins." North tells how Corelli made the violin speak like the "humane voice."

But not satisfyed with that, the gallants must have voices themselves, set off in Operas as amply as hath bin knowne in Itally. But how long this humour will hold without backsliding into Ballad-singing I cannot forsee, tho a fair proffer hath bin made of it in the celebrious and beloved enterteinment of the Beggar's Opera, which made a nightly assembly of the *beau mond* at the Theater for above a month uninterruptedly.

[24] Marked 7th ed.

[25] See Rimbault's ed., pp. 128 ff.

The letters of Mrs. Delany to Mrs. Ann Granville are full of references to the decline of Italian opera in the spring of 1728, mainly on account of the success of *The Beggar's Opera*. In a communication dated January 19, 1727/8 (a mistake for February 19?), she says:

> Yesterday I was at the rehearsal of the new opera composed by Handel: I like it extremely, but the taste of the town is so depraved, that nothing will be approved of but the burlesque. The Beggar's Opera entirely triumphs over the Italian one; I have not yet seen it, but everybody that has seen it, says it is very comical and full of humour; the songs will soon be published, and I will send them to you.[26]

On February 29, Mrs. Delany tells how she and her friends "were very merry, and sung the Beggar's Opera"; but she goes on to lament the downfall of its rival.

> The Opera will not survive after this winter; I wish I was a poet worthy the honor of writing its elegy. I am certain excepting some few, the English have no real taste for musick; for if they had, they could not neglect an entertainment so perfect in its kind for a parcel of ballad singers. I am so peevish about it that *I have no* patience.[27]

On March 12 she writes:

> To-morrow morning an opera is to be rehearsed; I have not heard of the fame of it, its name nor author. The last is a charming piece of musick, but quite neglected for the Beggar's Opera.[28]

On May 11 she says, "There is to be but four opera nights more, and then adieu to harmony of that kind forever and ever."[29] Considerably later, on December 20, 1729, she expresses again her regret over the same situation:

> The opera [one of Handel's] is too good for the vile taste of the town: it is condemned never more to appear on the stage after this night. I long to hear its dying song, poor dear swan. . . . The present opera is disliked because it is too much studied, and they [the people] love nothing but minuets and ballads, in short the *Beggar's Opera* and *Hurlothrumbo* are only worthy of applause.[30]

What seems to be satire against the new ballad opera, and not merely humorous occasional writing, is found in the following protest

[26] *Corresp.*, I, 156.
[27] *Ibid.*, I, 159-160.
[28] *Ibid.*, I, 162.
[29] *Ibid.*, I, 173.
[30] *Ibid.*, I, 229.

from *The Touch-Stone,* 1728, a collection of "Essays on the reigning Diversions of the Town." Speaking of the failure of Italian opera the past winter at Lincoln's Inn Fields, the author says:

> So finding their Finances run very low, by striving to do well, they thought it absolutely necessary to do something very bad, in order to retrieve their undone Affairs.
>
> This indeed they have happily effected in Conjunction with a great Poet; and by giving us something more execrable in relation to Musick than the World ever dreamt of seeing on any Stage, they are Made; and we run mad with Joy in being so agreeably disappointed.
>
> The *Beggar's Opera,* by robbing the Performers at *Pye-corner, Fleet-ditch, Moor-fields* (and other Stations of this Metropolis, famed for travelling Sounds) of their undoubted Properties, has reinstated them in Wealth and Grandeur; and what shock'd most Ears, and set most Teeth on edge, at turning the Corner of a Street, for half a Moment; when thrown into a regular Entertainment, charms for Hours.
>
> I must own they never appear'd to that Advantage in any musical Light as this Opera of *Beggars:* Their Rags of Poetry and Scraps of Musick joining so naturally, that in whatever View we consider it as to Character or Circumstance, its Title is the most *apropos* Thought upon Earth.

After this effusion, the writer tries to prove that Italian opera is an innocent and perfect entertainment. If there must be a new English opera to replace it, he says, it should not be of the type of Gay's piece. Italian opera altered, not substituted for, is his suggestion. Then, bringing from the enemy's camp news of the great popularity of the English rival, he scores those who favor the latter:

> Such Judges would again drop the *Provok'd Husband* for the miserable low Scenes in the *B——s O——a* and swallow greedily the wretched Dregs of Musick, which have occasion'd this incredible Run while Rhadamistus and Siroe are perform'd to almost *Empty Benches.*

The note to the *Dunciad,* written in 1729, apparently by Pope himself, gives much credit to the work of Gay in *The Beggar's Opera:*

> Furthermore, it drove out of England for that season the *Italian Opera,* which had carry'd all before it for ten years: That idol of the Nobility and the people, which the Great Critic Mr. Dennis by the labours and outcries of a whole life could not overthrow, was demolish'd by a single stroke of this gentleman's pen.

Chappell mentions a poem on the success of *The Beggar's Opera,* found in the *Miscellaneous Poems by several Hands* published by D.

Lewis, 1730.[31] It is called "Old England's Garland; or, The Italian Opera's Downfall," to the tune of the "Abbot of Canterbury." An edition of the *Vocal Miscellany* contains the words, from which the following lines are quoted.[32] We hear

> How old *England* grew fond of old Tunes of her own,
> And our Ballads went up, and our Opera's down.
> Derry down, down, hey derry down.

The author says of the Italian singers, Cuzzoni and Senesino:

> They still pick our Pockets, and fear no Alarm,
> For they thought their *Sonata's* for ever would charm;
> But the bold *Johnny* Gay he soon made it appear,
> That the Songsters had got the wrong Sow by the Ear.

Then,

> . . . nobly resolv'd their due Distance to teach 'em,
> He led forth his *Canary*-Birds, *Lock* and *Peachum.*

In the introduction to *Rosalinda,* a musical drama of 1740, the author, John Lockman, comments on the state of the opera. He calls Italian opera a "Syren," against the absurdities of which the people naturally rebel. Later he says:

> Among the several Attempts then made for that Purpose, none seem to have been so effectual as the polite Ridicule introduced by Mr. *Addison* almost at the Opening of the Spectator. Nevertheless the *Italian* Opera went on with great Success after this, till the Appearance of the *Beggar's Opera,* which was thought to have dissolved the musical Charm; if we may not ascribe it also to the Satiety of the Town, and the too great Weight of the Expence.

It will be sufficient to conclude these quotations with a passage from *The Companion to the Playhouse,* 1764:

> In short, the Satire of this piece was so striking, so apparent and so perfectly adapted to the Taste of all Degrees of People, that it even for that Season overthrew the Italian Opera . . . which Dennis, by the Labours and Outcries of a whole Life, and many other Writers, by the Force of Reason and Reflection, had in vain endeavour'd to drive from the throne of public Taste.
>
> Yet the Herculean Exploit did this little Piece at once bring to its Completion, and for some Time recalled the Devotion of the Town from an Adoration of mere Sound and Shew, to the Admiration of, and Relish for, true Satire and sound Understanding.

[31] *Popular Music,* II, 630.

[32] Clipping in R. J. Smith's dramatic materials, B.M.

After all such early evidence, it is impossible to pay much attention to the statement of Sir John Hawkins that "it is said, but without any foundation of truth, that it [*The Beggar's Opera*] contrived more to bring the Italian opera into contempt, than the invective of the poets and the friends of the drama, and the writings of Dennis, who had been labouring all his life to convince the world of the absurdity of this exotic entertainment."[33] To counteract such a view, the following unique passage from John Ireland sums up the general eighteenth-century idea of the accomplishment of *The Beggar's Opera* against its foreign rival:[34]

> If anything could balance the baneful influence it is calculated to disseminate, —Gay must be allowed *the praise* of having attempted to stem *Italia's liquid stream,* which at that time *meandered* through every alley, street, and square, in the metropolis,—*the honour* of having almost silenced the effeminate song of that absurd exotic, *Italian opera,* which a little previous to this time was the grand pursuit of the fashionable world. For to the dishonour of true taste, to the disgrace of common sense, the discords and jarrings of *Cuzzoni, Faustina,* and *Senesino,* excited as much attention, and were entered into with as much *party zeal,* as were the political contests between Lord Chatham and Sir Robert Walpole. . . .
>
> The method Gay took to rout this army of unnatural auxiliaries, does great honour to his generalship. A new disorder had been imported from the continent, and like the plague which was wont to be imported from Turkey, infected our capital. To lay an embargo upon sound was impossible;—to make an echo perform quarantine, ridiculous!—he took a better mode, drew up song against sing-song, and to the soft sonnetteering stanza of Italy, opposed the nervous old ballad of Britain. He brought into the field the whole force of three kingdoms, and took his tunes from the most popular songs of the ancient bards of *England, Scotland,* and *Wales. Britons strike home,* was the word;—*Chevy Chase* led the van, was followed by a *Soldier and a Sailor,* singing *All Joy to great Caesar,* and chorussed by *Shenkin of a Noble Race;* when *An old Woman clothed in Gray,* with a *Bonny Broom* in her hand, swept the whole swarm of buzzing caterpillars *Over the Hills and far away.* Goldoni's Opera I Viaggiatori Ridicoli tornati in Italia, was in a degree realized.

Ireland adds, in a footnote:

> An Italian I was once talking with upon this *crochet contest,* concluded an harangue, calculated to throw Gay's talents and taste into ridicule, with *"Saire, this simple signor did tri to pelt mine countrymen out of England with Lumps of Pudding";* another of the *Beggar's Opera* tunes.

[33] *Hist. of Music,* V, 315.

[34] *Hogarth Illustrated,* II, 342 ff.

It is absolutely certain that *The Beggar's Opera* proved a most powerful rival to Italian opera in the very first season. The historians of music, generally, have something to say on this score, although at times they attempt to soften the account of the misfortune of the classic music in conflict with the purely popular. Burney says Handel's *Siroe,* produced on February 17, 1728, had nineteen successive representations, "but having a powerful rival at Lincoln's-Inn Fields, in the Beggar's Opera, which came out the same winter, joined to the factious disputes concerning the superiority of the singers, this was not an auspicious season for the musical drama."[35] Handel's productions were not well supported, attention was constantly drawn to the opposing ballad opera, and finally the Italian theatre was closed on June 1, 1728, not to be reopened, for regular operas, till the following year, 1729. Wyndham says the "Royal Academy of Music had been a total failure from a financial point of view."[36] Handel's enterprise had existed for only a little over seven years. In this time the lack of money, the disputes of the singers and their adherents, the monotony of entertainment, and finally the ridicule of *The Beggar's Opera,* had gradually weakened the influence of the Italian school and forced it from the stage. A little satire may have gone a long way, and *The Beggar's Opera* may have had a fairly easy task, after all. At any rate, Gay's so-called opera achieved unprecedented success in the field of operatic productions.

Gay's work, of course, was not final. Italian opera got its hearing after a while, and the first ballad opera had to be supplemented by other satires and burlesques in and out of the original form. The attack on the foreign musical drama was carried on in the newspapers and pamphlet literature, in the pictures of Hogarth, and in the plays of Carey, Fielding, and Foote. Even as late as Sheridan's time, some lines in *The Duenna* could be taken as parody on the heroics of Italian opera;[37] and the minor musical pieces of that day furnished travesties of their own.

[35] *Hist. of Music,* IV, 333.
[36] *Annals of C.G.,* I, 38.
[37] See Nettleton's *English Drama,* p. 300.

CHAPTER XIV

THE BALLAD OPERA SEQUENCE

ASIDE from all other considerations, *The Beggar's Opera* is important as the prototype of a group of ballad operas, produced during and after 1728. It was only natural that there should be many rivals of the piece that had presented a new, positive, and permanent dramatic form. Ballad opera was to become a stock attraction, and descendants of *The Beggar's Opera* sprang up on every hand in the years closely following the big success at Lincoln's Inn Fields. It could hardly be expected that *The Beggar's Opera* would not find imitators when Gay himself, a literary pioneer, went so far as to produce two more pieces on the same plan, *Polly* and *Achilles,* in the heyday of ballad opera fame. *Polly,* the sequel, was not to be the second ballad opera; before its appearance several writers had begun to compete with the author of the new-found dramatic species. In the period between 1728 and 1740 a regular school of ballad opera was developed. After that time such plays appeared at intervals, but the fashion had fairly died out by 1760, thirty-two years from the original production, when the more modern comic opera type, with some or all original music, had begun to come into vogue.

The authors in this early ballad opera sequence ranged from unknown hack-writers to prominent dramatists who were willing to undertake work in a new field. Some of the pieces were made by those who had never written before, but who wished to duplicate the financial success of Gay or to be drawn into fame in the trail of his favored comedy. Regardless of rank, many of these writers seem to have taken scrupulous pains to adhere to the formula Gay had perhaps accidentally discovered in preparing his new dramatic composition. It is for this reason that the imitations of *The Beggar's Opera* are, as a whole, unimportant and almost unknown to-day. Aside from their keeping alive the custom of ballad compilation, with the consequent preservation and spread of many good English songs, they possess small literary value. Some of them seem to have been mere

catchpenny commodities to meet the sudden demands of the other theatres, envious of the popularity of *The Beggar's Opera* from season to season. John Rich, looking for a new success, and wishing to enter into keen competition, had a share in the production of the minor ballad operas, but the honors were pretty equally divided.

The imitations of *The Beggar's Opera* did not fare so well as their prototype. Some became popular, but more attracted little attention. Some were never printed, while some that were printed were never acted. The descendants of Gay's play, being usually cheap or colorless adaptations of the original form, found it too difficult a task to duplicate the triumph of the parent piece, especially in its own day. In the *London Magazine* for September, 1745,[1] we get a significant comment on the situation:

> Our *Ballad Operas* I shall take no farther notice of, than that they are absurd, when taken in any other Sense than as a Burlesque on the *Italian,* which undoubtedly was Mr. Gay's Design in his Beggar's Opera, the only good Piece of the Kind ever publish'd, or likely ever will, since none but Witlings and Dablers in Poetry have from that Time attempted them.

The direct influence of *The Beggar's Opera* on its dramatic offspring is evident. Some of the pieces were open, some covert, imitations of the title, form, manner, and even subject matter of their progenitor. Still more were original comedies cast in a similar mould. All of them, however, bear a marked resemblance to the pioneer musical comedy. In name many of the ballad operas hark back to Gay's piece. Even if there was not an internal imitation (frequently found), a title resembling that of *The Beggar's Opera* was no doubt considered a valuable asset in the bid for secondary popularity. In this matter of name Gay had set a pattern; there was nothing like it before 1728. As to the airs of *The Beggar's Opera,* they were made to do service over and over again, along with many from the sequel, *Polly*. If the new operas did not use the same airs, they often coincided in using certain other ballad tunes.

Aside from these ballad operas conforming strictly to the new type, many later plays may be found showing the influence of the prevalence of the latest English operatic style. Not only were old comedies altered into ballad operas, but the regular drama began to popularize itself at times, in its rivalry with the recent musical inno-

[1] P. 434, "Observations on the Stage."

vations, by adopting certain operatic features, such as the introduction of songs or dances. Musical composition was also definitely stimulated by the appearance of Gay's piece. It is in this way that *The Beggar's Opera* is indirectly responsible for the later school of comic operas, including *Love in a Village, Rosina, Lionel and Clarissa,* and *The Maid of the Mill,* to say nothing of the modern *Pinafore.*

In the Appendix to this volume will be found a descriptive list of the ballad operas following in the wake of Gay's popular musical comedy.[2] The definition of ballad opera, however, as an opera which makes use mainly of old ballad airs, instead of specially composed music, allows inclusion in this group of only the direct descendants in the original form.[3] It precludes consideration of indirect successors of *The Beggar's Opera,* like the subsequent comic operas with new melodies by such musicians as Linley and Arne. It is in this distinction that we find the principal difference between the ballad opera and later pieces like *The Duenna,* although they are built on the model of ballad opera. Professor Brander Matthews makes another distinction, classing *The Beggar's Opera* and *The Duenna* alike as ballad operas.[4] His main reason is that

> neither of them was a true comic opera as we understand the term. In the modern comic opera (and in the French *opéra bouffe*) the music is the first consideration. . . . The music, always composed expressly for the piece, is all-important, and to omit it would be impossible. But in the old ballad-opera, and in the French vaudeville, which is closely akin to it, the music holds a wholly secondary place; the story of the play is told in prose dialogue, and the songs (generally set to popular airs) are introduced in the middle of scenes, and could be omitted without spoiling the plot. This distinction is all-important. In the comic opera the music is original, and first considered; in ballad opera the music is generally selected and could, in a pinch, be omitted. The comic opera is a modern birth, and seems to be the result, in a measure, of gradual development from the ballad opera.

In general this may be accepted as true; but a definition of ballad opera which includes *The Duenna,* with its considerable amount of specially prepared music, seems a trifle too loose. Pieces of the *Duenna* type are in this work considered as comic operas of a later and second school, even though they may contain touches of the ballad opera form, and be a direct outgrowth from it.

[2] See section I.

[3] See *ante,* p. 128.

[4] *Harper's Magazine,* LX, 501.

CHAPTER XV

THE MUSIC AND THE SONGS

THE musical features of *The Beggar's Opera* contributed greatly to the success of the play, helping to make it popular, and also to keep it so. It would be too much to say that the airs and their new words carried the piece, but the British ballad tunes and Gay's suitable lyrics must be considered a distinct element in the sudden triumph of the opera in 1728, as well as in its enduring favoritism.

Gay was already well known as a writer of songs, and his ballads of "Black-eyed Susan" and "'Twas when the seas were roaring" were examples of his skill in fitting verses to music. These pieces, having caught the popular fancy, were not driven out even by the invasion of his ballad opera words to the same tunes. According to Spence, "Gay could play on the flute, and was therefore enabled to adapt so happily some of the airs in the Beggar's Opera."[1] It was this musical talent which gave Gay his interest in ballads and his fine ear for obtaining a close union of sense and sound.

Notwithstanding Gay's qualifications for choosing his ballad airs, credit for this part of the work has often been ascribed to Dr. Pepusch. It is not necessary to suppose, however, that Gay was obliged to consult anybody in the early preparation of music for the opera. That he himself is largely responsible for the selection of the airs seems certain; that he should have called to his assistance a musician of Pepusch's technical training to attend to the mechanics of presentation is naturally to be expected. In deciding what tunes should go into the new ballad opera, the poet undoubtedly exercised his own taste and judgment.

Dr. Pepusch did have a hand at the first in the music of *The Beggar's Opera,* but it was by the writing of the overture, as printed in the second edition, the arrangement of the airs for use in the theatre, and the addition of simple basses, as printed in the quarto third edition, 1729. If his part in the work went further, there is absolutely

[1] *Anecdotes,* p. 312.

nothing to prove it, and there are reasons why he might not have been fitted to give any additional aid. As a foreigner who did not know the English language thoroughly, he would hardly have had the feeling for words, to go with the ballad meter and rhythm, which Gay so plainly exhibited. The dramatist would know the whole range of English balladry, while Pepusch probably would not. Aside from the choice of his favorites and those pieces well suited for his purpose, Gay's selection could also easily have included airs which the public liked and had sung for years.

Sir John Hawkins does not overemphasize Pepusch's collaboration. He says the latter

> at the instance of Gay and Rich, undertook to compose, or rather correct, the music to the Beggar's Opera. Every one knows that the music to this drama consists solely of ballad tunes and country tunes; it was nevertheless necessary to settle the airs for performance, and also to compose basses to such as needed them; this the doctor did, prefixing to the opera an overture, which was printed in the first, and has been continued in every succeeding edition of this work.[2]

Such assistance could have followed Gay's own selection of the tunes, Pepusch having simply passed upon those proposed and arranged the ones Gay finally adopted. Burney says, on the other hand, that Pepusch

> was very judiciously chosen by Gay to help him select the tunes for the *Beggar's Opera,* for which he composed an original overture upon the subject of one of the tunes (I'm like a skiff), and furnished the wild, rude, and often vulgar melodies, with basses so excellent, that no sound contrapuntist will ever attempt to alter them.[3]

Many late editions of the play and some otherwise reliable histories and dictionaries of music give Pepusch credit for selecting the airs, or even writing the music itself, a mistake too obvious to require comment. Pepusch is not mentioned in the contemporary reviews of *The Beggar's Opera,* and his name was not printed with the work till the second edition, and then only with the overture.

There are sixty-nine songs in *The Beggar's Opera,* consisting of the sixty-eight in the earlier issues of the original edition and the one introduced in the last impression and subsequently retained. These furnish a definite body of pieces not added to in the later copies of

[2] *Hist. of Music,* V, 344.

[3] *Hist. of Music* (Burney's), IV, 635.

the play. In the history of the opera many of the songs came to be permanently omitted in representation and also in print, but except in a few modern instances real interpolations were never attempted. The extra lyric to the tune of "A Cobler there was" may have been used in the first performances and left out by mistake in the early printing. It is of a style with the rest and would have no special importance as a late insertion, unless for the purpose of bolstering up the political satire.[4] For many years, with a few exceptions, the music was printed merely in single vocal scores; accompaniments and embellishments were largely the work of late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century musicians. Aside from the sixty-nine airs, there was only the overture, with some incidental music for dances.

Apparently there are no original airs in the opera.[5] The melodies are mostly old ballad and dance tunes. The exceptions are tunes from a few contemporary popular songs, and songs from fairly recent plays, some French airs, and some operatic music. The rest are English, Scotch, and Irish airs, several of them folk tunes of uncertain date. Being old and long familiar, they needed only the fresh stimulus of the new ballad opera to increase to the highest extent their former popularity. One obvious error about their origin has gone into print in Aitken's *Life of Arbuthnot*:[6]

> Arbuthnot's daughter, Anne, is said to have furnished Gay with the airs for the Beggar's Opera, which are all Scotch. This story rests upon the testimony of Mr. Robert Arbuthnot, Secretary to the Board of Trustees, Edinburgh, who was intimately acquainted with Anne's brother George.

Such information is soon found incorrect when the separate pieces are examined. As to the two airs without names, it is possible that Gay neglected to set the titles down or could not recollect them; that he is quoting some titles from memory is suggested by slight word variants from the originals.

The sixty-nine airs are well chosen. It is but natural that there should be good and moderately good tunes in so large a collection, yet for all of the inequality none is actually poor. So much music for one evening's entertainment might well be something of a risk. There is often only a bit of dialogue between the songs, but there is

[4] See *post*, p. 193.

[5] See the doubtful case of "Cease your Funning," *post*, Appendix section II.

[6] P. 120, note.

never a disjointed effect. Certain pieces, however, became the leading supports of the play, and are to-day universally recognized where English music is known. *The Beggar's Opera* forever fixed some of the airs, and it became common for them to be thought of as *Beggar's Opera* airs, not as those of older ballads. Gay's songs in many cases gave new titles to the music. When these tunes were used later in songbooks, or mentioned in newspapers as orchestra numbers with other plays, they were invariably assigned to *The Beggar's Opera* which had made them an integral part of its reputation.

The ballad airs furnish a representative selection from British popular music. They are worthy of preservation and possess sturdy vitality to-day. Full of color and charm, they help to restore for us the eighteenth-century atmosphere, with its flavor of old songbooks and playhouses, the streets of London and the ballad singers, the coffeehouses and taverns, with now and then glimpses of the green fields of British rural life. The range of the melodies is wonderfully wide, leading from a flippant jig to music of hymn-like dignity, a contrast which may be very appropriate for opera burlesque. Their main characteristics are simplicity, spontaneity, and melody. Their subordinate trait is either liveliness or rustic dolefulness, according to their subject. Boswell testifies as to the connotation of Gay's tunes:

> Much of the effect of musick, I am satisfied, is owing to the association of ideas. . . . And I know from my own experience, that Scotch reels, though brisk, make me melancholy. . . . Whereas the airs in "The Beggar's Opera," many of which are very soft, never fail to render me gay, because they are associated with the warm sensations and high spirits of London.[7]

Hazlitt, writing in 1813, thought that to some of the songs as then sung on the stage

> a more dramatic effect might perhaps be given. There is a severity of feeling, and a plaintive sadness, both in the words and music of the songs in this Opera, on which too much stress *cannot be laid*.[8]

This statement is interesting in comparison with the opinion of Colman, who speaks, in his notes to Horace's *Ars Poetica*,[9] of a type of

[7] *Life of Johnson*, under date of 1777.
[8] *View of English Stage*, p. 37.
[9] P. xxv.

musical drama which "is as strange and incoherent a medley, and full as *unclassical,* as the dialogue and airs in the *Beggar's Opera!*"

If one wishes to see to what extent Gay created new material, and borrowed from, adapted, or parodied the originals of the songs in his comedy, he should compare the song texts of *The Beggar's Opera* with the lines of the old ballads given in the Appendix to this volume.[10] First of all, perhaps, he will be struck with Gay's originality, even when the burden of the older text is still sounding in his ears. Any close renderings are more pithy because of such parallelism; a certain comic value is often gained from the mental association of the two sets of words. The student of Gay's songs is impressed by the fact that the poet wrote his verses to the airs, instead of preparing pieces for which he hunted up suitable tunes. The combination is never distasteful. Another thing which is noticeable is that the songs show great variety of tone and treatment. When Polly needs to sing a piece with a melancholy setting, Gay brings forth "Grim King of the Ghosts" to furnish the appropriate atmosphere. In another moment he may present the merriest mood in a "Cotillon" ringing with the lively refrain of "Youth's the Season made for Joys." Thus he mixes the serious and sentimental with the glad and frivolous, with the result that the proper spirit is given to his humor, satire, or burlesque, while the best dramatic effects are also obtained. The music usually suits the scene and moment exactly, and the songs seem naturally introduced. It is remarkable that Gay, probably without much effort, was able to collect so fitting an assortment of usable songs. It is to be noticed that each of the three acts closes in character, the first two with intended *pathos* for a climax and the last with the jolly "Lumps of Pudding" for the curtain fall.

Most of Gay's songs are subjective, belonging to the play and its action. They seldom deal with outside subjects, except in figure or illustration, and rarely narrate. Like some of the measures of the music, his lines are often ordinary, merely holding together the more important parts. Many verses, however, are highly artistic and epigrammatic. If some proverbial expression leads up to the introduction of a song, the song itself usually continues it or adds a quotable maxim of its own. It is plain that some of the pieces are unnatural, as in any comic opera,—too pretty for their ugly surroundings, or

[10] See section II.

too trivial for their elevated associations; but they only heighten the humor or burlesque. At any rate, Gay improved upon the words of many of his originals, while most of the later imitations of his songs are cheap adaptations of his ideas of theft and the humors of the court.

Gay handles his different meters easily and furnishes by the variety of his songs several pleasing contrasts. His experiments with duets and trios are interesting. Some of these seem close forerunners of modern operatic styles. The choruses are scarce, but they break the monotony of the solo work. The medley sung by Macheath in the Condemned Hold is really one long lyric, divided into fragments as the tune changes. The effect is that of fast music quotation. The hero highwayman not only sings, but talks, thinks, and drinks in music, with a different air at every turn to suit the mood or motion. Such a feature as this must have delighted an early eighteenth-century audience, and the medley remained popular in later presentation.

Taken as a whole, the music and the songs of *The Beggar's Opera* play a very important part, and, regardless of the clever dialogue and satire, could not be dispensed with. There is much beautiful music in the piece, more than one composer, or even two or three, could have possibly furnished. It is right here that Gay's work has special distinction. The songs, whether used for oral pleasure or mere fun in connection with the plot, being backed by good old-fashioned English music, have always a positive flavor. They are a bright spot in a prosaic age. *The Beggar's Opera* taught England the value of ballad music for stage use; one might say it transferred ballad singing from the streets to the theatre and gave it a new literary, as well as a dramatic, significance. The first work of its kind in the history of English drama, it has exerted ever since a remarkable influence over the musical world.

Let Thackeray describe Gay's art (partly original, partly borrowed by association from the native tunes), as he finds in *The Beggar's Opera*

> a peculiar, hinted, pathetic sweetness and melody. It charms you and melts you. It is indefinable, but it exists; and is the property of John Gay's and Oliver Goldsmith's best verse, as fragrance is of a violet, or freshness of a rose.[11]

[11] *English Humorists* (Fourth Lecture).

CHAPTER XVI

SOURCES, WRITTEN AND UNWRITTEN

WHILE it may be interesting to speculate as to where Gay got material in general for his play, the search for sources yields small returns. The preceding chapters have discussed the original idea for the work and the foundations of the operatic satire; the chapter following this will show that certain personal experiences gave the author a chance to vent his spleen, even if it was in a fairly good-natured way. Aside from such beginnings, however, there is little to suggest that Gay worked over the ideas of others in writing his play. Indebtedness to former authors is slight, indeed. After an examination for possible influences and direct suggestions, we are forced to conclude that Gay's piece is based largely on personal experience and that its realism is not second-hand. It is not necessary to suppose, at the outset, that Gay was obliged to borrow from anyone at all. Few writers of his time were better fitted to originate than he. Of course Gay's nature, as well as the great interest of his friends and patrons, might seem likely to lead him to seek the easiest way of achieving his purpose; but his own observation, talent, and literary experience, with the strong support of men like Pope and Swift, would be sufficient capital for his enterprise.

Pope's terse statement as to Gay's sole authorship is enough, if it is genuine, to remove doubt as to any part that the writer of the *Dunciad* may have taken in *The Beggar's Opera*. Constant criticism and oral recommendations would naturally occur, but direct aid is specifically denied by these words of Pope, recorded by Spence:

> Dr. Arbuthnot was the sole writer of John Bull; and so was Gay of the Beggar's Opera. I own appearances are against the latter; for it was written in the same house with me and Dr. Swift. He used to communicate parts of it, as he wrote them, to us; but neither of us did any more than to alter an expression here and there.[1]

[1] *Anecdotes*, p. 145.

Spence has another similar bit of Pope's gossip about *The Beggar's Opera:* "As he carried it on, he showed what he wrote to both of us; and we now and then gave a correction, or a word or two of advice: but it was wholly of his own writing."[2] Pope seems to have gone out of his way to clear Gay of contemporary charges of collaboration, which had no doubt arisen in consequence of the satirical attacks that may have suggested himself or Swift. Aside from the passages of political bearing, however, nothing in the ballad opera suggests the hands of Gay's two friends; on the contrary, the subject matter and treatment seem more suited to his talent than to that of either of them. Such a work would be entirely out of their field; experience proved that it was very much in his. Besides, if Pope had helped considerably with *The Beggar's Opera* he undoubtedly would have claimed his share of the glory after the huge success of the piece. In the case of the unfortunate *Three Hours after Marriage* (1717) he had remained silent about his full part, but his attitude might have been quite different in the matter of this new talk of the town. Pope had boasted of the alterations he had caused in Addison's *Cato:* "I believe he did not leave a single word unchanged that I made any scruple against."[3] If he now was aiming to shield himself, the effort was entirely foreign to his usual practice. It is very likely that he was simply telling the truth.

Notwithstanding Pope's explanation, the little poet was suspected, along with Swift, and stories of his revision of lines for the pointing of satire have several times been repeated in print.[4] Sir Walter Scott, writing in 1814, says:[5]

> About this time,[6] too, Swift is supposed to have supplied Gay with the two celebrated songs, after ingrafted in the Beggar's Opera, beginning, "Through all the employments of life," and, "Since laws were made for every degree." Warton has assigned both to Pope, but the internal evidence is in favour of Mr. Deane Swift and Mrs. Whiteway, who uniformly declared they were written by the Dean.

Scott adds, in a footnote:

[2] *Anecdotes,* p. 159.
[3] See Paston's *Mr. Pope, His Life and Times,* I, 79-80.
[4] See *post,* p. 180.
[5] *Life of Swift,* in *Works of Swift,* I, 351.
[6] After March, 1727, and Swift's breach with Walpole.

Swift never saw the Beggar's Opera in a complete state until it was printed; but it does not follow that he contributed no songs. . . . While these three wits, indeed, held their meetings at Twickenham, it may be difficult to assign to each individual his share in a labour which they were all willing to further.

The net result of such conjecture is little to fix definitely the authorship of Swift, and one must only *suppose,* with Scott, that he supplied the songs in question.

Henry Angelo, writing in 1828, has something to say, though with a different application, about the same two songs:[7]

The incredible success of this opera was supposed to be entirely owing to the squibs that it played off against the court. Many of these, though let off by Gay, who was a disappointed candidate for court favour, were charged by Pope, whose wit ignited into a fiercer fire.

The song of *Peachum,* the thief-taker, as written by Gay, was less severe, until Pope altered the two last lines,

"The Priest calls the Lawyer a cheat,
The Lawyer be-knaves the Divine,
And the Statesman, because he's so great,
Thinks his Trade is as honest as mine."

These stood in Gay's manuscript ——

"And there's many arrive to be Great,
By a Trade not more honest than mine."

The still more audacious verses which the "Wasp of Twickenham" could claim entirely as his own, in the song of *Macheath,* after his being taken, were,

"Since Laws were made for every degree,
To curb vice in others as well as in me,
I wonder we han't better company
Upon *Tyburn* tree."

These, it appears, were not only Pope's, but most of the satirical parts pointed at the court and the courtiers, which made so considerable a part of the opera, were contributed by his epigrammatic pen.

Angelo cites no early authority, however, upon which to base his assertions, and the whole argument, like Scott's comment, seems to rest on a rumor that probably gained wide currency in the literary gossip of the eighteenth century.

Another theory of collaboration is that regarding the authorship of four more songs in *The Beggar's Opera.* This is first found in Cooke's *Memoirs of Macklin,* published serially, as *Mackliniana,* in

[7] *Reminiscences,* pp. 25-26.

the *European Magazine,* 1799 and 1800, and in book form, 1804. The author says:[8]

> The first song, "The Modes of the Court," was written by Lord Chesterfield; "Virgins are like the fair flower in its lustre," by Sir Charles Hanbury Williams; "When you censure the age," by Swift; and "Gamesters and Lawyers are jugglers alike," *supposed* to be written by Mr. Fortescue, then Master of the Rolls.

In a footnote Cooke adds: "The above information came through the medium of the late Dowager Lady T —— d."[9] This evidence rests solely on the statement of one person, whose knowledge of the matter might not be definite to a certainty, or whose declaration final. Wheatley makes the doubtful statement, not supported by authority, that being no

> experienced playwright, Gay did not introduce his songs until about the middle of the play. This had to be remedied, so the wits set to work to help their colleague and produced a series of additional songs.[10]

Then he repeats the information given by Cooke, implying that the four songs mentioned were written to balance the play. If this writer had said "experienced opera-maker," his opinion would be more soundly expressed, but even then the statement would not be definite. As a matter of fact, the four songs Wheatley mentions, following Lady Townshend, are not all before "the middle of the play." How, then, could the "series of additional songs" remedy the defect suggested?

An example of loose general statement not backed by specific information, and in this case not at all convincing, is the following from Oxberry's *Dramatic Biography:*[11]

> This piece [*The Beggar's Opera*] was unquestionably the product of several hands: that the wits of the day contributed songs to it is notorious, and it is not improbable that some may have contributed to the dialogue.

Much more stimulating is an incidental passage from a contemporary pamphlet, in the letter of address to the author of the *Dunciad:*[12] "if you had any hand in the *Beggar's Opera,* as it is to be suspected

[8] P. 60.
[9] Townshend.
[10] *Hogarth's London,* p. 308.
[11] I, 11 (1825).
[12] *A Compleat Collection,* 1728.

you had." This, too, is vague, but it suggests actual literary gossip of Gay's time. Another interesting side-light on the talk of the town, this time in connection with the posthumous *Achilles,* occurs in the *Gentleman's Magazine* two months after the poet's death:[13]

> Mr. Gay was often obliged to own what he never wrote, when the Success did not answer; and others took the Reputation of what was approved of, and he willing resigned Fame to Interest or Friendship: But his good Friends have wounded his Reputation more by *writing for him,* than his most inveterate Enemies by writing against him. The Songs in general are spurious; yet establish Mr. Gay's character, who was said to have receiv'd considerable Assistance in those of the Beggar's Opera; since those supposed Assistants have *now,* not only wrote beneath the Beggar's Opera, but even the *Imitations* of it.

Aside from any such collaboration with Gay, there may possibly have been slight borrowing from printed literature, both consciously and unconsciously. This should not be magnified, however, and the originality of the dramatist ought rather to be stressed. No more than some of his thieves can Gay be caught with stolen goods. Since few literary parallels can be found, the discussion here is practically limited to those pieces which have been suggested by previous commentators on *The Beggar's Opera.*

The first piece is *A Jovial Crew, or The Merry Beggars,* by Richard Brome, acted in 1641. Professor Brander Matthews thinks Gay may have borrowed "a hint or two" from this play.[14] George Upton says Gay undoubtedly found the germ of *The Beggar's Opera* in Brome's comedy.[15] J. H. Burton says:

> Whatever we may hold as to the merits of the piece [*The Beggar's Opera*], the idea centering in dialogues enriched with the slang of the degraded orders, was not new. A specimen of it was popular in London when Gay was at work on his, in the shape of Brome's "Jovial Crew."

He seems to hold it curious that of Brome "so little is known that he is not easily identified," while Gay is buried in Westminster Abbey.[16] It is of course possible that the low-life setting, the beggar characters, the rough comedy, and the many songs of *A Jovial Crew* could have foreshadowed the Newgate opera, but it is hardly plausi-

[13] Feb., 1733, quoted from *Daily Courant,* Feb. 16.
[14] *Harper's Magazine,* LX, 502.
[15] *Musical Pastels.*
[16] *Reign of Queen Anne,* III, 292.

ble to enforce the idea that Gay had Brome's play specifically in mind.

The second piece is *A Woman's Revenge, or A Match in Newgate,* by Christopher Bullock, acted in 1715. In the dedication to the second (1728) edition of this play, which is an adaptation of *The Revenge, or A Match in Newgate,* there is a specific charge of plagiarism laid against Gay. The anonymous writer thus accuses the author of *The Beggar's Opera:*

> And now you see, in the *First* Year of King George the *Second,* that Mr. *John Gay,* who turns the Transactions of all the World into *Fables,* has *Metamorphosed* Mr. *John Marston's* Dutch *Courtezan,* into the Dutchess of ——— ——— and your Mother acts the Part, and does not prove her Marriage. . . . The *Beggar's Opera,* Mr. *Gay* stole from Mr. *Bullock,* who only Borrowed it of Mr. *Marston;* and the Law says, The Receiver is as bad as the Thief.

All of this, besides being unreasonable, seems merely the expression of envy of the success of *The Beggar's Opera.* Pearce calls this accusation ridiculous, but Sarrazin,[17] though finding the similarity trifling, thinks the agreement between the two pieces sufficient to make probable, to some degree, a perhaps unconscious influence on Gay. For instance, he points out that in a *A Woman's Revenge* a courtesan, deserted by her lover, plays a leading rôle. This is straining a point to find a counterpart for Lucy, who is only a simple girl, seduced.

If we examine *A Woman's Revenge* we discover little that would have helped Gay in writing *The Beggar's Opera.* Here is the extent of the similarity: Several of the characters are felons. Mixum, a Vintner, and Mrs. Mixum are the nearest approach to Peachum and his wife. In the first scenes, at Covent Garden, there is a Mother Griffin, an old bawd, who faintly suggests Diana Trapes. The name Padwell might also suggest Padington. Some of the passages on marriage, lawyers, money, and death do contain similar ideas, but Gay could have devised his speeches without consulting a mediocre piece like this. The scene is not located at Newgate till toward the middle of Act III. It is first outside of the prison, then in a chamber of Newgate, and finally in the Lodge of Newgate. Bevil is in prison, with no hope for reprieve, but is suddenly pardoned, and so given to Miranda under the shadow of the gallows. The ordinary is announced and then Thinkwell says, "Come young Fellows, take your Girls by

[17] *John Gay's Singspiele,* pp. xii-xiii.

the Hands, and lead up to the little old Gentleman in Black." This is the closest parallel to anything in *The Beggar's Opera,* and it is not very convincing. The general plot is not at all similar. It is also certain that *A Woman's Revenge* was not considered a forerunner of Gay's play; this is shown by the fact that during 1729 a ballad opera, modeled on the original musical comedy, was made out of it, under the title of *Love and Revenge.* We are safe in concluding that the similarity to *A Woman's Revenge* was just enough to enable the hack-writer of the dedication to exploit new wares.

The third piece is *Harlequin Sheppard,* produced and printed in 1724. It is mentioned by Sarrazin as one of the contemporary works from which Gay may have drawn ideas for *The Beggar's Opera.* The influence of the Sheppard career will be considered in connection with the unwritten sources of the play, but it is sufficient to dismiss this sketch as a mere echo of the true history of the notorious thief. The common setting of the two works is the only basis for comparison. The beginning of the piece

> discovers *Sheppard* in the Room call'd the *Castle* of *Newgate* with his Fetters on, and padlock'd to the Ground. The Music plays a Plaintive Tune. He seems ruminating on his hard Condition.

This reminds one of Macheath in a similar position, but it does not necessarily foreshadow that situation. In the midst of roguish harlequinade Gay's ballad of "Newgate's Garland" is introduced, sung by some of the prisoners to the tune of "Packington's Pound." Following the real accounts of Sheppard and Jonathan Wild, the scenes are laid inside and outside of Newgate, at a pawnbroker's, and at an alehouse.

The fourth piece is *The Prison Breaker, or The Adventures of John Sheppard,* an anonymous farce printed in 1725. Pearce, although he could not find much resemblance between *The Beggar's Opera* and *A Woman's Revenge,* declares that this play "stands in a different category."[18] He thinks Gay is clearly indebted to this work, without being guilty of plagiarism. In several respects the comparison is striking, but we must remember that both Gay and the author of *The Prison Breaker* were drawing from the same general facts of contemporary London life. That their materials should coincide is

[18] See *Polly Peachum,* p. 178, and also pp. 22, 27-28.

not strange; the interesting thing is that the wording at times in the farce suggests definite lines and situations in *The Beggar's Opera.* The characters of *The Prison Breaker* include, besides Sheppard and Jonathan Wild, the thief-taker (here called Wile), File (Filch?), Nym (Nimming Ned?), and Rust and Careful, two jailors. Another is Coax-thief, who keeps a public house where the thieves resort. The first scene, at Newgate, exhibits Rust and Careful at a table, with bottle and glasses. They are discussing Sheppard and what he will be worth to them. Once Rust cautions Careful thus: "Don't speak your Mind too freely." There is mention of hanging, the Old Bailey sessions, and so forth. Rust says "Brother Careful." In another scene, after Sheppard has escaped, Rust calls for a jailor named Lockfast (Lockit?). The next scene exhibits the gang at Coax-thief's house, where the thieves are discussing Sheppard's death, which will occur on the morrow, and philosophizing on the subject. Sheppard suddenly enters, singing, shakes hands all around, and gives directions and receives reports. The men talk of stolen goods in the manner of Gay's conversations. In the second act Coax-thief and his wife are found in dialogue about their life, business, and customers. In a later scene, when Sheppard comes in drunk, Nym says, "You're as fine as a Lord." Jack "lays his Pistols on the Table," and Wile, the Constable, and the Watch come in and seize him. Wile says, "You must go to your Lodging again." When Sheppard is brought back to prison Rust invites him thus, "Your Servant, Mr. *Sheppard,* you are welcome home." The robber relieves his mind to Jonathan: "I am sure I shan't leave so great a Villain upon Earth as my self, unless it be your Worship." The play ends with Sheppard on the eve of his death.

The Prison Breaker is, at best, a stupid performance. Sheppard and his men, as pictured here, are common housebreakers, and with their coarse, drunken manners are hardly clear prototypes of Captain Macheath and his gang. The question arises, Did Gay use *The Prison Breaker* at all? Since the play was never acted he would have had to draw from the printed copy. The correspondence of many ideas and of some of the episodes does seem to point to a working over of the scenes of the farce of 1725, with girl characters introduced for a touch of romance. Yet the real Newgate, with its records of similar occurrences, characters, and speech, was quite as close at hand as the published farce upon the subject. It is of course possible that Gay,

having long considered the Newgate idea proposed by Swift, watched all contemporary contributions to the literature of roguery, with the plan of putting something of his own upon the stage as soon as he found the proper opportunity.

It should be noticed, however, that the public seemed willing to overlook these minor *crook* plays in favor of *The Beggar's Opera.* The latter does not seem to have been recognized as an adaptation of several stage scenes, or even a work not performed. There is no suggestion in the writing of the time of Gay's indebtedness to such a piece as *The Prison Breaker.* Even the person who, in 1728, accused Gay of plagiarism went back to Bullock's *A Woman's Revenge,* of 1715. A passage in *Select Trials* of the Old Bailey, 1734-35, tells how *The Prison Breaker* was subsequently transformed:[19]

> This was never acted at any of the Theatres: But after it had lain a long while neglected, it was intermixt with Songs and Catches; and acted at *Bartholomew-Fair,* by the Name of *The Quaker's-Opera.*

It is significant that the author does not mention *The Beggar's Opera,* the foremost piece of Newgate literature of that time, as in any way indebted to *The Prison Breaker.* Walker, the original Macheath, worked over *The Prison Breaker* into *The Quaker's Opera* in 1728, after Gay's success. The revised version was more indebted to *The Beggar's Opera* than the latter could possibly be to the anonymous Newgate farce. The fact that Walker's opera was taken as an imitation of *The Beggar's Opera,* and that nothing was said about Gay's borrowing from Walker's real original in subject matter, is some proof that no indebtedness on the part of Gay was discovered.

Other sources have been pointed out by Sarrazin, far-fetched general parallels which might better have remained unnoticed.[20] For instance, this energetic critic finds that the figure of Lucy recalls the jailor's daughter in *The Two Noble Kinsmen;* that the conclusion of the first act suggests the well-known parting scene in *Romeo and Juliet;* and that the robber Macheath has a certain family resemblance to the heroes of earlier comedies, and might even be an illegitimate son of Farquhar's Sir Harry Wildair, or a grandson of Wycherley's Manly. If the family tree is traced further, says Sarra-

[19] Quoted by Villette, *Annals of Newgate.*

[20] See *John Gay's Singspiele,* pp. xiii ff.

zin, we shall perhaps come to Molière's Don Juan, in *Festin de Pierre.* His point here is that just as Don Juan falls into difficulty between the country wenches, Mathurine and Charlotte, so Macheath is placed between Polly and Lucy (*Festin de Pierre*, II, v, and *The Beggar's Opera,* II, xiii, and III, xi). He insists that Gay's dialogue voices the similarity, and that in the rich, satirical style of the speeches, and the half-French sounding staccato of the conversations, the influence of the older comedy can be recognized.

We must not forget that Gay's literary burlesque may have led him to parody, indirectly, several well-known dramatic scenes, speeches, or characters. To argue that he is indebted to these as serious sources would be both unreasonable and absurd. Take, for instance, the prison scene in Steele's *The Lying Lover,*[21] which Gay possibly had in mind in arranging a sentimental scene "which the Ladies always reckon charmingly pathetick." If one were to hold that Gay borrowed, rather than parodied, this specific passage, he would probably also have to deal with many additional prison scenes, sentimental and otherwise, such as those in Heywood's *A Woman Killed with Kindness* and Jonson's *The Devil is an Ass.* It is not necessary to believe that Shakles, in the latter play, is the prototype of Lockit! For Macheath, as a character type, Gay did not have to copy from the highwayman in Farquhar's *The Beaux' Stratagem.* He would need no other source than his supposed pseudonym of 1716-18, *Sir James Baker,* the gambler and *Knight of the Peak.*[22] As to the Introduction of the Beggar and the Player, *The Rehearsal* easily furnished a pattern for Gay, as well as for Fielding and Sheridan.

When all is said, Gay is not found guilty of substantial plagiarism, or deprived of any real originality. Except in the case of allusions in the vein of satire or burlesque, it is not safe to attempt specific points of influence and debt. The new musical comedy, which had no type source, was quite ready to use stock characters, speeches, scenes, and situations, especially because of its operatic style. As far as its subject matter is concerned, it seems to have popularized former Newgate material, rather than to have imitated it. This is indicated by the fact that both *A Woman's Revenge* and *The Prison Breaker* were made over into operas as soon as Gay had pointed the direction. The

[21] Act V, Sc. i.

[22] See article on Gay by G. A. Aitken in *Westminster Review,* 140: 386.

same thing may be said of *A Jovial Crew,* with its beggar setting. Thus the question of sources often becomes one of sources reversed. *The Beggar's Opera* has had more influence and imitators than it ever had literary originals.

When we turn to the unwritten sources of *The Beggar's Opera* we are on firmer ground, and are fairly successful in finding material which existed, ready at hand, for Gay to include. Along with such non-literary sources, any information preserved in the periodicals, biographies, or public records of the day, information which soon became a part of the daily experience of a London citizen, should also be considered. Gay's knowledge of contemporary events and his familiarity with real life would be gained through observation, reading of local news, and common gossip of the town.

The realism of *The Beggar's Opera* is apparent to one who has examined contemporary documents relating to the London of 1728, and especially Newgate and its inmates. Gay needed little besides the true histories, oral and written, of famous criminals and the accounts of activities inside the prison and out, both by the thieves and the keepers themselves. In addition, the author of "Trivia, or the Art of Walking the Streets of London" no doubt knew the city as he would a favorite book. His experience would range from Newgate to St. Giles's, and back again. Tavern life would come within his own rounds, while the haunts of highwaymen would be known at least by report. Gay has even been accused of having relished low society, along with some of the Bohemian wits of his day. That he visited the resorts of the ballad singers is not an unlikely story.[23]

Chief among the unwritten sources of *The Beggar's Opera* is the career of the notorious Jonathan Wild, the thief-taker. There is so distinct a parallel between him and Peachum that we cannot fail to believe Gay had him directly in mind. The original audience would easily catch the similarity, because there was much talk, as well as much writing, about the life and manners of this character. There were probably many minor Wilds, but the Newgate annals show that Jonathan was the one long suffered and most offensive. Wild was hanged at Tyburn in 1725, and then all London, which had heard of him for years, was flooded with the various printed matter about his roguery.

[23] See Pearce, *Polly Peachum,* pp. 26-27.

In Captain Alexander Smith's *Memoirs of Jonathan Wild,* published the year after the thief-taker's execution, we find much to suggest that Gay used the traits, customs, and activities of Wild for the purposes of his play. Smith speaks, in his introduction, of

> the Neglect of such Prosecutions [as those of men like Wild], occasion'd by our shameful Negotiations with Thieves, or their Agents, for the Recovery of *Stoln Goods,* by which, in Reality, we became Aiders and Abettors to them.

He discusses the injustice of allowing such men to live. From his talk one would imagine that, in spite of the statutes, Peachums were still thriving in 1728:

> That Rogues should be industriously dispers'd throughout the City, and Suburbs; That different Hours, and Stations, should be observ'd among 'em; and regular Books kept of Stoln Goods; that the Superintendant in his hopeful OEconomy should almost every Sessions, for a Reward, Betray, Prosecute, and Hang, one or more, of these his Acquaintance, and at the same Time keep on his Correspondence with the Survivors, whom, one after another, he sends to their *Triangular Home;*[24] that Magistrates should not only know and see this, but likewise continue to make Use of such a Person for an Evidence, and in a Manner own that they were beholden to him in the Administration of Justice; that, I say, all these Things should be Facts, is something very extraordinary, in the principal City, and the home Management of a Kingdom, so formidable Abroad, and of such Moment in the Ballance of *Europe,* as that of *Great Britain.*

The *Newgate Calendar* tells how Wild, himself the most notorious thief in London, played the go-between and still held his gang in subjection. It mentions how he put people off with the evasion of not yet having received intelligence about the stolen goods. He is described as one who looked upon himself as a person of considerable consequence, and dressed in lace clothes and wore a sword. The reference to his keeping of books suggests that Gay's device of having Peachum read off a list of thieves, with descriptive comments, was only a frequent occurrence with Jonathan Wild. Thus what to-day may have lost some of its point would have been keenly enjoyed in 1728. A passage in *Select Trials* speaks of Wild's real wife and five others "who supplied the Place of Wives." If Gay had the famous reprobate in mind, Peachum's talk on marriage is thus given realistic background.

[24] The gallows at Tyburn.

Another fruitful source, if Gay really drew from contemporary material for his Macheath, is the career of the daring Jack Sheppard, executed, after many robberies, in 1724. There were many such robbers, of course, but Sheppard is clearly defined in the Newgate records as the boldest and cleverest of them all. His name was for a long time before the public, in the newspapers, in biographies, and even on the stage in harlequinade. Sheppard became associated with Wild, and the latter had a hand in finally apprehending the rogue. The accounts of his execution and his somewhat triumphant journey to Tyburn show how thoroughly fascinated the crowd was with the exploits of a desperado, and how much such a character was really admired as a hero. The recorder of *Select Trials* tells how extremely popular Sheppard was among the lower classes in 1723: "Jack was now become so eminent, that there was not a Prig in *St. Giles's,* but thought it an Honour, as well as an Advantage, to be admitted into his Company."

Villette's *Annals of Newgate* recounts adventures of Sheppard which closely resemble some of the events of *The Beggar's Opera.* Sheppard seems to have frequented the Black Lion alehouse in Drury Lane, where he made merry with the women of the town. His arrests were frequent, but so were his escapes from Newgate. Villette quotes from *Select Trials* about his appearance between times among his friends of Drury Lane:

> He strutted about in a fine Suit of Black, a light Tye-Wig, and a Ruffled Shirt, with a Silver-hilted Sword by his Side, a Diamond Ring on his Finger, and a Gold Watch in his Pocket, notwithstanding he knew there was a diligent Search made after him.

On one of these occasions he dined with his two women at a public house in Newgate Street. Another passage from *Select Trials,* quoted by Villette, reads:

> I don't remember any Felon in this Kingdom, whose adventures have made so much noise as *Sheppard's.* He was for a considerable Time the common Subject of Conversation. I have seen six or seven different Histories of his Life; and several Copper-Plates, representing the Manner of his escapes out of the Condemned-Hold and the Castle in *Newgate;* besides other Prints of his Effigies.

Of course, in most of the accounts of his escapades, Sheppard is represented as a common thief and burglar, rather than a polite

romantic highwayman. If Gay had this person in mind, he must at least be given the credit of making a refined hero out of him. There may have been a basis in the facts of Sheppard's career, but the character creation of Macheath is almost wholly new. Besides, Sheppard is the leader of no gang. Wild, the Peachum of real life, must be looked to for such distinction.

If Gay needed additional patterns from real life for his hero highwayman, he could have found many reports of the deeds of other celebrated gentlemen of the road. The *Newgate Calendars* are full of accounts of many minor Macheaths. When one reads these he is more fully convinced that Gay, in designing his leading character, drew from no single literary prototype, but created an imaginary figure built up on the common idea of Sheppard and a dozen more of his kind. Many highwaymen had been noted for their daring, politeness, and humor. The suave Frenchman, Claude Du Vall, who committed the boldest robberies on Blackheath, was well known. He had come to London at the time of the Restoration, as the servant of an Englishman, and had at once demonstrated his proficiency in gaming, drinking, and making love. When he turned highwayman he retained his gentlemanly characteristics, and, in Macheath's own style, displayed generosity, wit, and even eloquence. When he was executed at Tyburn, at the age of twenty-seven, his death caused much excitement in the English capital. Other thieves, of a lower order, were noted for their loose living and their many wives. One is said to have had eight women—a circumstance which would make Macheath's marital complications of little importance!

For further realism of *The Beggar's Opera* one has only to consult the Old Bailey session papers, the *Annals of Newgate,* the *Newgate Calendars,* and other records of the London underworld. The *History of the Press-Yard*[25] discloses many of the customs of the early Newgate, and also the abuses which those in charge were allowed to enforce. It is not unlikely that Gay had several times visited the prison, then a definite part of London life, and that he had observed the institution with the idea of later putting some of its oddities and picturesque happenings into literary form. His letter to Swift, on October 22, 1727, says:

[25] London, 1717.

You remember you were advising me to go into Newgate to finish my scenes the more correctly. I now think I shall, for I have no attendance to hinder me; but my Opera is already finished.

There is no record that Gay carried out his intention, but he could easily have revised his lines after a special trip to the prison.

On the whole, the search for unwritten sources of *The Beggar's Opera* is much more satisfactory than any attempt at definite tracings back to literary parallels. Realism, largely from the author's own experience, must be considered paramount.

CHAPTER XVII

POLITICAL SATIRE

THE satire of *The Beggar's Opera,* which helped greatly to popularize the play, was directed not merely at Italian opera, but at contemporary politics, society, and literature. Gay is at his best in strong, but good-natured, raillery at various abuses of his time. His *Fables* show that satire, which was a peculiar expression of the age, was not unknown to him as an instrument for holding up people and their customs to ridicule. They furnish, at the same time, a good example of his attitude toward corruption at court and in high life generally. It will be noticed, however, that in this dramatic piece there are no traces of anger or a morbid desire to retaliate. Gay's reaction against disappointments or affronts was different; his reply, though cutting, he preferred to cover with the shadow of burlesque. The musical features, also, helped to gloss the things which might have been offensive from the stage. Throughout *The Beggar's Opera,* not taking himself too seriously, Gay played the wit and humorist while he drove his satire home.

In carrying out any satirical purpose, the author chose, for the most part, to make his attack general, rather than specific. Drawing his pictures true to life, he obtained, at the same time, many a particular application which, though striking, could not be interpreted as a personal insult. By subtle allusions, by parallel illustrations, by suggestive names, scenes, and situations, he pointed the way for a quick understanding on the part of a contemporary audience of thrusts at certain individuals in high position. It would be wrong to insist that nothing special was intended, for there are several instances of a close approach to distinct allusions. It must be remembered, however, that it is easy to miss the original meaning, and seize upon something which never occurred to the writer himself as being specific satire. A letter of Gay to Caryll, in April, 1715, discussing the attack on *The What d'ye Call It,* tells how the author of the pamphlet has "endeavoured to show that every particular passage of

the play alludes to some fine point of the tragedy [*Cato*], which he says I have injudiciously and profanely abused."

The fact that the play still goes well on the stage, after nearly two hundred years, is proof that the satire is more general than specific. Deprived of the interpretation that an early audience readily gave to the seasonable and topical thrusts, *The Beggar's Opera* to-day (in both England and America) has continued its universal appeal to pleasantry, on account of its solid basis of realism and humanity. Much of the dialogue and many of the songs are as appropriate to our own age as they were to the eighteenth century, and, whether or not the keenest points were occasioned by special provocation, can be called suitable to any time or place. Both in scene and character certain fundamental types are shown, and there are so many hits at all branches of society that to make them personal or specific would be fatal to the humor and imagination of John Gay. Perhaps some of the contemporary caricature has been lost, as it is in the work of Fielding and Foote. At least a large part of the satire in *The Beggar's Opera* should be considered as belonging to the class of general ridicule which is represented by the pungent *Pinafore*. Whereas the parody in *The Rehearsal* is direct, and the satire of Fielding is particular and local, Gay seems to have struck a balance between their kind and the comparative absence of definite hits in a play like Sheridan's *The Critic*, in which many specific instances are often sought, but seldom found.

An examination of early external evidence furnishes significant material for illustration of Gay's political satire. Contemporary comment on *The Beggar's Opera* indicates that in its own day the piece was considered by some an attack upon the government in general, and by many an attack upon the administration of Sir Robert Walpole in particular. It is practically certain that those who saw the play in its early representation would be able to judge correctly the meaning of the author, even if not to the smallest details.

The correspondence between Pope, Gay, and Swift hints several times at the satirical intention of the play, and even openly suggests it. On February 26, 1728, Swift wrote to Gay:

> Does Walpole think you intended an affront to him in your opera? Pray God he may, for he has held the longest hand at hazard that ever fell to any sharper's share, and keeps his run when the dice are charged.

On March 28, Swift wrote to Gay:

> We hear a million stories about the opera, of the encore at the song, "That was levell'd at me," when two great Ministers were in a box together, and all the world staring at them. I am heartily glad your opera has mended your purse, though perhaps it may spoil your court.

Later in the same letter he said, "To expose vice, and to make people laugh with innocence, does more public service than all the Ministers of State from Adam to Walpole . . ."

In *Mist's Weekly Journal* for March 23, 1728, is an article which begins:

> I have observ'd as often as I have been present at the Beggar's Opera, that whenever the facetious Mr. Hall sings the following Words ["When you censure the Age," etc.], he is received with a more than ordinary Applause.

The writer insists that

> the Reflection made in that humorous Ballad, lays before us a true Picture of the present Times; the whole world has of late seen a great deal of this humour, and a Spirit of Spleen and Resentment has risen up and shewn itself against certain Writers, only for mentioning those sawcy words, Bribery and Corruption.

What might fit Gay's case exactly comes in a later paragraph:

> But it would be very hard, if an Author must be charged with Sedition every Time he speaks with Detestation of evil Actions and bad Men; and, as such a Proceeding, fairly stated, must appear idle and absurd, it is to be hoped, it will be left off for the future.

A letter from Broome to Elijah Fenton, on May 3, 1728, contains this passage:

> I have seen Mr. Gay's opera. Johnny is a good-natured inoffensive man. I doubt not, therefore, but those lines against courts and ministers are drawn, at least aggravated, by Mr. Pope, who delights to paint every man in the worst colours. He wounds from behind Gay, and like Teucer in Homer, puts Gay in the front of the battle, and shoots his arrows lurking under the shield of Ajax.

Broome, though he may be right about Pope's pointing of the political satire, overlooks the fact that Gay had more cause to attack the government than the poet of Twickenham.

The *Twickenham Hotch-Potch,* published in May, 1728, tells, in the introduction, how the "Ministers of our most August *Monarch*"

have been "ridiculed under the prime Characters of a *Thief*-Catcher, a *Jaylor,* and a *Highwayman.*" In referring thus to Peachum, Lockit, and Macheath the writer evidently has Walpole and Townshend in mind.

Gay had probably anticipated a key to *The Beggar's Opera,* as he had for *The What d'ye Call It* and *Gulliver's Travels.* He found it in "A Compleat Key to the Beggar's Opera, by Peter Padwell of Padington, Esq.," an addition to *A Woman's Revenge,* in 1728. This work had already appeared in the *Craftsman* of February 17, 1728, in the form of a letter to Caleb D'Anvers, signed "Phil Harmonicus." Speaking directly of Gay's piece, the writer argues:

> It will, I know be said, by these *libertine Stage-Players,* that the *Satire* is *general;* and that it discovers a *Consciousness* of Guilt for any *particular Man* to apply it to *Himself.* But they seem to forget that there are such Things as *Innuendo's,* (a never-failing Method of explaining *Libels*) . . .

The writer says he will

> undertake to prove beyond all Dispute, that *The Beggar's Opera* is the most venomous *allegorical Libel* against the G——t that hath appeared for many Years past.
>
> There are some Persons who esteem *Lockit,* the Keeper, or *prime Minister* of *Newgate,* to be the *Hero* of the Piece; to justify which Opinion, they take Notice that He is set forth, on the Stage, in the Person of Mr. Hall, as a very *corpulent bulky* man, and that He hath a *Brother* named *Peachum,* who, as represented by Mr. *Hippisley* appears to be a *little, awkward, slovenly* Fellow . . . But I am obliged to reject this Interpretation as erroneous, however plausible it may be, and to embrace another which is more generally received; viz. that Captain *Macheath,* who hath also a *goodly* Presence, and hath a tolerable *Bronze* upon his Face, is designed for the *principal Character* and drawn to asperse *somebody in Authority.*

Further on the writer says, "His satirical strokes upon *Ministers, Courtiers,* and *Great Men,* in general, abound in every Part of this most *insolent Performance.*" After many specific examples from the play to illustrate his points, the author concludes:

> *What reasons induce the G—— to be thus* passive, *under such* repeated Insults, *I do not take upon myself to determine,* but though I am far from wishing, as I know it will be objected, to see the *Liberty of the Stage entirely abolished,* yet I think such *licentious Invectives* on the most *polite* and *fashionable Vices* require some *immediate Restraint* . . .

This looks like the work of D'Anvers himself, who was now a member of the opposition party. If it was, the writer can be counted on as speaking ironically throughout, ridiculing the resentment of the Whig administration against Gay and *The Beggar's Opera*. How extensively the satire of the play had been accepted is plainly indicated by this reply from the *Craftsman*.

In the skit "To Pretty Miss Polly Peachum," printed along with the same edition of *A Woman's Revenge*, four lines are to the point:

> Ev'ry Page *Gay* has writ,
> Tho' 'tis stuff'd up with Metre;
> Points out P——y and *Parliament*,
> God Bless the *Speaker*.

A plain reference to contemporary opinion on the subject of Gay's satire is found in *A Compleat Collection*, 1728, following mention of *The Beggar's Opera:* "a Minister cannot be much more abused by being compared to Mr. Pope than by being liken'd to a common Thief, or a Thief-taker, as was before done in the Dramatick Satire." Two song lines from the opera are then quoted, "And the Statesman," etc.

One of the most interesting contemporary documents relating to the satire of the play is Swift's "A Vindication of Mr. Gay and the Beggar's Opera," an article in the *Intelligencer*, published in Dublin in 1728.[1] The Dean first discusses the play as a very agreeable entertainment, original and full of humor. Then, after talking in general of the right to satirize a court or ministry, he says:

> My Reason for mentioning *Courts* and *Ministers*, (whom I never think on but with the most profound Veneration) is, because an Opinion obtains, that in the *Beggar's Opera* there appears to be some Reflection upon *Courtiers* and *Statesmen*, whereof I am by no means a Judge.
>
> It is true indeed, that Mr. Gay, the Author of this Piece, hath been somewhat singular in the Course of his Fortunes; for it hath happened, that after Fourteen Years attending the *Court*, with a large Stock of real Merit, a modest, and agreeable Conversation, a *Hundred Promises*, and *Five Hundred Friends*, he hath failed of Preferment, and upon a very weighty Reason. He lay under the Suspicion of having a Libel, or Lampoon against a great M——. It is true that Great M—— was demonstratively convinced, and publickly owned his Conviction, that Mr. Gay was not the Author; but having lain under the Suspicion, it seemed very just, that he should suffer the Punishment,

[1] No. III. This quotation is taken from the London reprint.

because in the most reformed Age, the Virtues of a great M------ are no more to be suspected than the Chastity of *Caesar's* Wife.

It must be allowed, That the *Beggar's Opera* is not the first of Mr. Gay's Works, wherein he hath been faulty, with Regard to *Courtiers* and *Statesmen.* For to omit his other Pieces, even in his Fables, published within two Years past, and dedicated to the *Duke* of Cumberland, for which he was Promised a Reward, he hath been thought somewhat too bold upon *Courtiers.* And although it is highly probable, he meant only the *Courtiers* of former Times, yet he acted unwarily, by not considering that the Malignity of some People might misinterpret what he said to the Disadvantage of present *Persons,* and Affairs.

Swift's statements make an evasion of the real truth, in an effort to shield the author or turn the satire into a general application. The personal letters between the two men furnish material which belies the sincerity of the Dean's position here. The following quotations from the same article are to be discounted:

All *Ranks, Parties,* and *Denominations* of Men, either crowding to see his *Opera,* or read it with Delight in their Closets, even *Ministers* of State, whom he is thought to have most offended (next to those whom the Actors more immediately represent) appearing frequently at the *Theatre,* from a Consciousness of their own Innocence, and to convince the World how unjust a Parallel, *Malice, Envy* and *Disaffection to the Government have made. . . .* This *Comedy* contains likewise a *Satyr,* which, although it doth by no Means affect the present Age, yet might have been useful in the former, and may possibly be so in Ages to come: I mean where the Author takes Occasion of *comparing* those *common Robbers to Robbers of the Publick;* and their several Stratagems of betraying, undermining and hanging each other, to the several Arts of *Politicians* in Time of Corruption.

In "A Collection of Poems on Several Occasions; Publish'd in the Craftsman,"[2] by Caleb D'Anvers, is "An Excellent New Ballad, called, A Bob for the C—t, To the Tune of, *In the Days of my Youth—In the first Part of the* Beggar's Opera." Stanza VI runs:

> If *Macheath* you should name, in the Midst of his *Gaxz, fa la*
> They'll say 'tis an Hint you would *Somebody* hang; *fa la.*
> For *Macheath* is a Word of such evil Report, *fa, la,*
> *Application* cries out, *That's* a Bob *for the C——t, fa la.*

Swift's letter to Sir Charles Wogan, on August 2, 1732, contains the following passage:

I find at present your genius runs wholly into the grave and sublime, and therefore I find you less indulgent to my way by your dislike of the Beggar's

[2] Printed in 1731.

Opera, in the persons particularly of Polly Peachum and Macheath, whereas we think it a very severe satire upon the most pernicious villainies of mankind. And so you are in danger of quarrelling with the sentiments of Mr. Pope, Mr. Gay the author, Dr. Arbuthnot, myself, Dr. Young, and all the brethren whom we own.

Later on the Dean adds, "You see Pope, Gay, and I, use all our endeavours to make folks merry and wise, and profess to have no enemies except knaves and fools."

The Modern Poet. A Rapsody, 1736, has these verses:

> Its Want of Taste the Town did most display,
> When it receiv'd the Operas of *Gay*.
> Dukes, Earls, and Knights, to *Lincoln's* Theatre throng,
> To hear themselves lash'd in each painted Song.

In his *Mr. Pope's Literary Correspondence,* a series of letters published between 1735 and 1741, Curll prints some material that is very interesting, if not genuine. He gives three letters purporting to be from "Abbe C——n to ** at St. Omers." In a footnote he says:

> Here I strongly smell another Plot, and Abbe C——n, certainly lives at Twickenham. By the Help of Fortunatus's Cap, Mr. Pope has made the Tour of St. Omers, in order, 1. to satyrize the conduct of the present Ministry; (2) to whitewash himself; and (3) to compliment his Friend Gay, to whom the three foregoing letters were written, as surely as those in the former volumes: For the works of his Friend, and the Catastrophe of his Play, evidently allude to the Beggar's Opera.

The passage Curll points out is at the beginning of the third letter:

> Forgive me, if I obtrude my Advice; think not of publishing, as yet. Your Works, like fine Painting and Wine, will ripen into more Worth by Age; you should certainly complete the Catastrophe. I rejoice you have resisted the temptation offer'd; it would be madness to throw an appearance of Partiality on the Face of your Performance, which you have so bravely avoided in every other part. The devil is black enough in his real character; the truer you can paint him, the more damnable he will appear.[3]

Other eighteenth-century comments, as well as some early in the nineteenth century, point to the established fact of Gay's satire, considered as either mild or intense. In *The Parrot,* a series of letters "By the Authors of The Female Spectator,"[4] printed in 1746, this

[3] II, 150-157.

[4] Mrs. Eliza Haywood.

passage, suggesting the social as well as the political side of Gay's work, is found:[5]

I should be extremely sorry indeed to be assured that this Piece of Satire were as *just* as it is *severe;* but till I am so, will not give myself the Mortification of thinking it any more than the Over flowings of a momentary Spleen . . . a constant Strain runs through it [the entire play], of putting the whole Species pretty much upon a Level in this Particular.

A French critic and poet, Anthony Yart, writing in 1754, voices a foreign opinion on the subject:[6]

Gay avait trop vécu avec les Ministres et les Courtisans, pour ne pas connoitre leurs vices et leurs ridicules: mécontent d'eux il laissa épancher toute sa bille dans cet Ouvrage.

He finds that Gay's beggar and robber characters resemble perfectly the "Gens de la Cour."

Coxe, in his *Memoirs of Walpole,* published in 1768, says of Gay's failure to gain court favor that the poet's

discretion afterwards, destroyed every hope. Soon after this disappointment, he produced the Beggar's Opera; and both his conversation and writings were so full of invectives against the Court, that all expectations of farther notice from the queen were obviously relinquished.[7]

Sir John Hawkins, in 1776, wrote as follows of *The Beggar's Opera:*

It was in truth a satire, and that so general, as to include in it all stations and characters, and in short, every class of men whose rank or situation of life was above that of the author. The motive for writing this play, and for the many acrimonious expressions and bitter invectives against statesmen, lawyers, priests, and others, contained in it, was the disappointment of Mr. Gay in his application for preferment at court.[8]

The editor of Bell's edition of the play in 1791[9] indulges in a similar criticism of Gay and *The Beggar's Opera:*

The Design was originally caught from a hint by Swift; and, as a man, into whatever ground he may venture, usually carries his anger and his prejudices

[5] No. IX, pp. 28-29.
[6] *Idée de la Poesie Anglais,* VI, 608-609 ("Pour Gay's Beggar's Opera").
[7] See pp. 279 ff.
[8] *Hist. of Music,* V, 315.
[9] London.

along with him, so the Beggar's Opera became the vehicle of his spleen; and those, whose influence he could not obtain, he lowered to the level of Highwaymen and Housebreakers. That the Court felt any soreness at the satire, it is not easy to imagine:—If the severity were insupportable, they knew how to *stop* it. The anger of mortification usually vindicates where it injures—injustice heals the venom in which resentment steeps the shafts of the satyrist.

At the end of the century, Kirkman, in his *Memoirs of Macklin* (1799), thus repeated the story of Gay's bitterness:

Gay himself often sought for a *Mecaenas* in vain—his mind was smarting under the recollection of the neglect that he had suffered, and he gave full scope to his severity, which he conveyed through the medium of the *Beggar's Opera,* with great poignancy of expression.

The writer calls the satire inflammatory.[10]

Sir Walter Scott says of the poet's declining an ushership in 1727: "Gay, with proper spirit, refused the appointment, and, in the Beggar's Opera, took a most ample satisfaction upon King, Queen, and ministers."[11]

Cooke calls attention to certain specific passages supposed to be directed at Walpole.[12] He says that Gay

by frequently comparing highwaymen to courtiers, and mixing other political allusions, drew the attention of the public to the character of Sir Robert Walpole, then Prime Minister, who, like most other Prime Ministers, had a strong party against him, who constantly took care to make or find a comparison between the two characters.

He thus relates the incident at the first night's performance:

In the scene where Peachum and Lockit are described settling their accounts, Lockit sings the song,

"When you censure the age, &c."

which had such an effect on the audience, that, as if by instinct, the greater part of them threw their eyes on the stage-box, where the Minister was sitting, and loudly *encored* it. Sir Robert saw this stroke instantly, and saw it with good humor and discretion; for no sooner was the song finished, than he encored it a second time himself, joined in the general applause, and by this means brought the audience into so much good humor with him, that they gave him a general huzza from all parts of the house.

[10] I, 239.
[11] Life of Swift (1814), in *Works of Swift,* I, 360-361.
[12] *Memoirs of Macklin* (1804), pp. 53-57.

But, notwithstanding this escape, every night, and for many years afterwards, that The Beggar's Opera was brought out, Macklin used to say, the Minister (Sir Robert Walpole) never could with any satisfaction be present at its representation, on account of the many allusions which the audience thought referred to his character. The first song was thought to point to him—[13] The name of *Bob Booty,* whenever mentioned, again raised the laugh against him: and the quarrelling scene between Peachum and Lockit, was so well understood at that time to allude to a recent quarrel between the two Ministers, Lord Townshend and Sir Robert, that the House was in convulsions of applause.[14]

We have often asked Macklin the cause of this quarrel between the two Ministers; but he could not remember, nor perhaps did he ever distinctly know. The late Lord Orford, however, has explained it; and, as the transaction is rather curious, we shall relate it in this place.

Then follows, in quotation, this account of the controversy Gay is supposed to have travestied:

Walpole, after quitting the Palace in one of those conferences wherein he differed with Lord Townshend, soon after met him at Col. Selwyn's, Cleveland Court, in the presence of the Duke of Newcastle, Mr. Pelham, Col. and Mrs. Pelham. The conversation turned on a foreign negociation, which, at the desire of Walpole, had been relinquished. Townshend, however, still required that the measure should be mentioned in the House of Commons, at the same time, that the House should be informed, "that it was given up." Walpole objecting to this proposal as inexpedient, Townshend said, "Since you object, and the House of Commons is more your affair than mine, I shall not persist in my opinion; but as I now give way, I cannot avoid observing, that, upon *my honour,* I think that mode of proceeding would have been most advisable." Walpole, piqued at this expression, lost his temper, and said, "My Lord, for once, then, there is no man's sincerity which I doubt so much as yours; and I never doubted it so much as when you are pleased to make such strong expressions." Townshend, incensed at this reproach, seized him by the collar—Sir Robert laid hold of his in return—and both, at the same instant, quitted their holds, and laid their hands on their swords. Mrs. Selwyn, alarmed, wanted to call the guard; but was prevented by Pelham, who made it up between them; though the contemptuous expressions used on this occasion rendered all attempts to heal the breach ineffectual. This circumstance happened in the latter end of the year 1727, and The Beggar's Opera came out in 1728. Lord Townshend retired from all employments in the year 1730.

It is therefore no wonder that a political *morceau* of this consequence should be preserved by Gay; and as the Minister was not only inimical to him and his party, but to the generality of the nation, the audience triumphed in this act of humiliation, and kept up the ridicule of the story for many years, which upon any other occasion would have died away.

[13] "Through all the Employments of Life," etc.

[14] See also *post,* Appendix section II, Act III, Air VII.

An intimate piece of testimony, coming from Gay's own family, is found in the memoir by Rev. Joseph Baller, the dramatist's nephew, prefixed to the posthumous publication called *Gay's Chair*, 1820. Some of the statements may be discounted on the grounds of personal pride or an attempt to defend a relative's reputation, but their general substance is consistent with the appearance of facts outside:

> In this work [*The Beggar's Opera*] he is pretty severe upon courtiers; and though the minister, Sir Robert Walpole, appeared publicly to applaud the satire of the piece, yet soon after, to show his resentment to the Author, he took from him his apartments in Whitehall, where he [Mr. Gay] had lodged for several years, and which apartments had been granted him by the Right Honorable the Earl of Lincoln. . . .
>
> His satire was never personal, though in the latter part of his life he wrote with more asperity against the Great, than was natural to his usual affability and evenness of temper. His honest soul was often roused with indignation against the growth of that venality and corruption, which he feared might ultimately prove the ruin of his country.
>
> In his severest remarks upon the vices and follies of mankind, he carefully avoided all invectives and acrimonious reflections . . . It was only undeserved honors, luxury, and immorality that he struck at, and left the vicious to make a self-application, and to suffer remorse from their own inward shame, and sense of guilt.

Many of the early charges of satire on the part of Gay are no doubt far too elaborate, but they at least show that while some of the hits could be taken as applying to the politicians of any period, others had a fairly narrow application to the administration and to the conditions of the court around 1728. The correspondence between Gay, Swift, and Pope supports the idea that a good deal of such satire was likely to be inserted. Gay was a member of the opposition party, and, though it is hard to imagine him active or strongly interested in politics, his friendship with such Tories as Swift, Pope, and Bolingbroke would have clearly defined his own position, and led some to suspect that his associates had sharpened his pen. Gay may have had nothing against Walpole personally, but his antagonism could rest firmly on his experiences at court, especially his latest disappointment.[15] *The Beggar's Opera*, besides, may properly be considered one of the three most prominent literary works of the opposi-

[15] See *ante*, p. 123, and *post*, pp. 189 ff.

tion at that time, along with Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* and the *Dunciad* of Pope. In judging the satire of the play we must remember that people may have taken sides according to their politics, not their dramatic judgment, and interpreted the lines to suit. Such a controversial aspect gave the opera much desirable advertising, although it is not necessary to believe, with a modern writer, that "the incredible success of this opera was supposed to be entirely owing to the attacks on the Court."[16] One factor must not be mistaken for the whole influence in the triumph of *The Beggar's Opera.*

To support the foregoing idea of political satire, the following significant passages are found in the letters exchanged in Gay's circle. They help to show the extent of the opposition of the dramatist and his friends to the ministry and the court, and indicate how natural it was for Gay to make use of his new ballad opera to satirize his real or fancied opponents.

August 16, 1714—Gay to Arbuthnot, or Swift.[17] This letter contains a treatise in dialogue between a Politician and a Student, the first two speeches of which are:

> *Politician.* What are the necessary tools for a prince to work with?
> *Student.* Ministers of state.

September 29, 1725—Swift to Pope: "I hear nothing of our friend Gay, but I find the Court keeps him at hard meat."

May 13, 1727—Swift to Dr. Thomas Sheridan:

> We are here in a strange situation; a firm and settled Resolution to assault the present Administration, and break it, if possible. It is certain, that Walpole is peevish and disconcerted, stoops to the vilest offices of hireling scoundrels to write Billingsgate of the lowest and most prostitute kind, and has none but beasts and blockheads for his penmen, whom he pays in ready guineas very liberally.

October 22, 1727—Gay to Swift:

> The queen's family is at last settled, and in the list I was appointed gentleman-usher to the Princess Louisa, the youngest Princess; which, upon account

[16] Fitzgerald, *Hist. Eng. Stage,* II, 28. This statement is taken almost verbally from Angelo's *Reminiscences.* See *ante,* p. 165.

[17] Ball's Swift's *Corresp.,* II, 219.

that I am so far advanced in life, I have declined accepting, and have endeavored, in the best manner I could, to make all my excuses by a letter to her Majesty. So now all my expectations are vanished; and I have no prospect, but in depending wholly upon myself, and on my own conduct. As I am used to disappointments, I can bear them; but as I can have no more hopes, I can no more be disappointed, so that I am in a blessed condition.

October 22, 1727—Pope to Swift (joint letter with Gay):

Gay is a free man, and I writ him a long congratulatory letter upon it. Do you the same: it will mend him, and make him a better man than a Court could do.

November 23, 1727—Swift to Gay:

I entirely approve your refusal of that employment [the ushership], and your writing to the Queen. I am perfectly confident you have a firm enemy in the Ministry. God forgive him, but not till he puts himself in a state to be forgiven.

January 18, 1728—Swift to Carteret:

Your friend Walpole has lately done one of the cruelest actions I ever knew, even in a Minister of State, these thirty years past, which if the Queen hath not intelligence of, may my right hand forget its cunning.

February 26, 1728—Swift to Gay:

I wonder whether you begin to taste the pleasure of independency? or whether you do not sometimes leer upon the court, *oculo retorto?* Will you not think of an annuity, when you are two years older, and have doubled your purchase-money? Have you dedicated your opera, and got the usual dedication fee of twenty guineas?

It is plain that Swift was thoroughly convinced that Walpole was responsible for the recent slight, on account of the latter's suspicion of Gay as the author of a libel against the government. Swift also believed that Walpole had influenced Queen Caroline, who, as the princess, had intended, according to her own statement to Mrs. Howard, an intimate friend of Gay, to "take up the hare" when the new administration began. In "An Epistle to Mr. Gay" the Dean is free with his opinion regarding the part of Mrs. Howard:

> Fain would I think our female friend sincere,
> Till Bob, the poet's foe, posses'd her ear.

It is possible, however, that the Queen's jealousy of Mrs. Howard,

officially her bedchamber woman, but unofficially the King's mistress, ruined the plan of the latter for Gay's advancement.

In these circumstances, Swift, as well as Pope, congratulated Gay on his refusal of the position offered, and would have keenly enjoyed any additional satire that the dramatist cared to insert in his opera as a veiled reply to the court and the ministry which he blamed for his treatment. It is logical to suppose that if Gay had accepted the ushership he would have restrained his satire on the government, or withheld it altogether. The disdain with which he refused a post of attendance on a royal child may have led directly to specific satire on the court.

The satirical element in *The Beggar's Opera,* from an external standpoint, is well illustrated by the prohibition of Gay's sequel to the play, called *Polly.*[18] The printed version of *Polly* seems so free from any specific attack, and its satire is so much more general than that of its predecessor, that one is soon led to believe the prohibition of the sequel was not due to the fear of a repeated assault, but directly to the resentment of the ministry at the real satire of *The Beggar's Opera,* which had gained widespread recognition. Walpole, supported by the King, must have considered the original opera a thorn in the flesh, and took this means of getting revenge upon the author of the seditious drama, and possibly upon the opposition party which supported him. The fact that Gay was soon afterwards deprived of his lodgings at Whitehall, which he had occupied for several years, and the fact that his letters were read by the post office, show plainly that he had lost all favor with the government. If his first satire had been overlooked he would surely have been allowed to stage a second piece, especially if it was weaker and more harmless than the other, and to remain peacefully in the shadow, if not in the employment, of the court. When we consider, also, that the Duchess of Queensberry was banished from the court because she undertook to sell copies of *Polly* at St. James's, and that consequently the Duke was tempted to resign his official position under the crown, the whole matter of the influence of *The Beggar's Opera* as a recognized political satire assumes unusual importance. Dr. Arbuthnot cleverly suggests the situation when he says:

[18] For a full account of this piece, see Chapter XX.

> The inoffensive John Gay is now become one of the obstructions to the peace of Europe, the terror of the Ministers, the chief author of the Craftsman, and all the seditious pamphlets which have been published against the government.[19]

It is not unreasonable, then, to claim for *The Beggar's Opera,* along with *Polly,* a considerable influence among the circumstances which led to the licensing act of 1737. Until the prohibition of *Polly,* little authority had been exercised over the stage. Since the somewhat minor opposition to satirical plays before 1728 had caused the censorship to become unpopular in England, the Lord Chamberlain had rarely exerted himself to make investigations, even to improve the quality of entertainments presented to the public. It seems to have been the effective satire of Gay's opera, as acted in 1728 (*Polly* was only read by the censor), that first led the ministry to take special notice of the fact that the drama could become an embarrassing mirror of contemporary politics. Whatever the immediate causes of the new law,—among them Fielding's *Pasquin* and *The Historical Register,* and *The Golden Rump,*—it is significant that Walpole was instrumental in forcing the act through both houses of parliament. The Minister's experience with the two parts of *The Beggar's Opera* furnishes a direct connection with the legislation of 1737. Incidentally, it is worth noting that Walpole took no measures for a permanent censorship until five years after the death of Gay, who had first brought him into such unwelcome prominence on the stage.

All the foregoing material has concerned the external evidence of political satire, or the sources or motives for it, in *The Beggar's Opera.* When we turn to the question of internal evidence, and examine the text of the play itself, we find many interesting and significant points. The early writers on the subject seem to be confirmed in their opinions at almost every turn. At the same time, as we follow the idea of general rather than special satire, it is hard to decide on definite details which plainly show local and personal thrusts.

The following miscellaneous examples, taken in order straight through the text, will illustrate Gay's prominent mention of the nobility whose methods had at least affected him, regardless of any true basis for charges of corruption: p. 5, "What business hath he to keep Company with Lords and Gentlemen? he should leave them to

[19] Letter to Swift, March 19, 1729.

prey upon one another"; p. 6, "If the Girl had the Discretion of a Court Lady, who can have a dozen young Fellows at her Ear without complying with one, I should not matter it"; p. 7, "If an unlucky Session does not cut the Rope of thy Life, I pronounce, Boy, thou wilt be a great Man in History"; p. 8, "A Woman knows how to be mercenary, though she hath never been in a Court or at an Assembly"; p. 9, "Why, thou foolish Jade, thou wilt be as ill-us'd, and as much neglected, as if thou hadst married a Lord!"; p. 17, "You might sooner tear a Pension out of the Hands of a Courtier"; p. 19, "Show me a Gang of Courtiers that can say as much"; p. 31, "In one respect indeed, our Employment may be reckon'd dishonest, because, like Great Statesmen, we encourage those who betray their Friends"; p. 31, all of song xii, beginning, "When you censure the Age"; p. 42, "You see, Gentlemen, I am not a meer Court Friend, who professes every thing and will do nothing"; p. 42, all of song iv, beginning, "The Modes of the Court so common are grown"; p. 55, all of song xxvi, beginning, "Since Laws were made for ev'ry Degree."

It is interesting to notice that the song which for some reason was omitted from the earlier issues of the first edition, but which appeared in a later impression, and then in the second edition and thereafter, is crammed full of political satire. The opening lines run thus:

> Our selves, like the Great, to secure a Retreat
> When Matters require it, must give up our Gang.

Aside from these scattered references to the court and the government, there is an elaborate picture of organized dishonesty, with its symbolical adaptation to the political and courtly sphere. Peachum's account books and register of his gang suggest a system of which high officials, like Walpole, might be proud, and of which they were perhaps not wholly ignorant. Gay's satire, to quote from the preface of Cumberland's edition, 1829, shows

> that which is plain robbery in Filch, borrows a more polite term as it ascends to Peachem; and when transferred from Peachem to my lord, it loses all its odium, and changes not only its name, but its signification. . . . This opera is not a satire on *low*, but on *high* life—not on highwaymen and pickpockets by profession, but on titled knaves and demireps, whom no law can reach. . . .

Peachum, as a thief-taker, justifies his employment; his obtaining of

information money by betraying some of his men regularly in order to get "a decent Execution against next Sessions"; and his allowing others to go free, for the sake of further profit from their crimes. Gay seems to infer that, under the existing laws, the Peachums could "soften the evidence," or that with the proper bribery a jury could be persuaded to bring in a verdict of manslaughter instead of murder.

The extended figure of the *gang* is the most effective stroke of the general political satire. The first song begins the idea, which is continually enlarged:

> And the Statesman, because he's so great,
> Thinks his Trade as honest as mine.

Peachum tells his wife that his daughter should be to him "like a Court Lady to a Minister of State, a Key to the whole Gang." Throughout the play are touches which might be taken as supplementary to this thought of higher roguery. Macheath tells his associates that he will give them "the Hint who is worth Setting," possibly as another kind of chief would give directions for a different sort of theft. He furthermore speaks of one who "is a necessary Agent to us." That one of the gang should not be meddled with is plainly declared by the hero highwayman—"He's a good honest kind of a Fellow, and one of us." Diana Trapes is wise enough, after giving her assistance, to wash her hands of any doubtful business of the gang. In several places Gay seems to allude to a common practice at court or in politics which winks at superior dishonesty, vice, and crime.

The subordinates of Peachum and Macheath murmur among themselves about the laws which are leveled at them, while others have free rein to carry out a like occupation on a higher scale. Peachum and Lockit, from another point of view, looking to the men higher up, express similar ideas of the inequality of public justice. "Can it be expected that we should hang our Acquaintance for nothing," exclaims Peachum, "when our Betters will hardly save theirs without being paid for it. Unless the People in employment pay better, I promise them for the future, I shall let other Rogues live besides their own." If Gay made any challenge to the people against a corrupt ministry, it is to be found in the speech in which the sentenced Macheath addresses his friends: "*Peachum* and *Lockit*, you know,

are infamous Scoundrels. Their Lives are as much in your Power, as yours are in theirs. . . . Bring those Villains to the Gallows before you, and I am satisfied."

By humorously exposing the abuses of Newgate, Gay is able to hit again the system of the government which allows unfair treatment of the wretches confined within the prison, and knavish violation of the spirit of the law by the officials. Lockit is pictured as a man who, considering his inmates as lodgers for his own benefit, demands a fee at every turn. The custom of paying garnish upon arrival at Newgate is featured fully. The keeper, knowing what is fittest for his guests, selects expensive chains which decrease in weight in proportion to the rise in price. Macheath, usually calmly philosophical in every situation, is made to protest: "The Fees here are so many, and so exorbitant that few Fortunes can bear the Expence of getting off handsomly, or of dying like a Gentleman." After Lucy has let her lover escape while her father is "drinking hard with the Prisoners," almost the first consideration of the keeper is, "Did he tip handsomely? . . . How much did he come down with? . . . Perhaps, you have made a better Bargain with him than I could have done." Not long before, Macheath's words were: "Of all the Arguments in the way of Business, the Perquisite is the most prevailing.—Your Father's Perquisites for the Escape of Prisoners must amount to a considerable Sum in the Year."

In at least three ways Gay may have alluded directly to Sir Robert Walpole. The first is by the use of proper names. Robin of Bagshot, a character who has little to say in the piece, is given prominence in the conversation of Peachum and his wife. In the black-list he is called "*Robin* of *Bagshot,* alias *Gorgon,* alias *Bluff Bob,* alias *Carbuncle,* alias *Bob Booty.*" Underhill, the latest editor of Gay's poems, says that no one could fail to see that this member of the gang "was designed to represent Sir Robert Walpole's unrefined manners, convivial habits, and alleged robbery of the public."[20]

The second supposed allusion to Walpole is found in the relations of Macheath with Polly and Lucy. The *Memoirs* of Lord Hervey tell how the minister kept as a mistress a merchant's daughter named Maria Skerrit, upon whom he bestowed a large annual allowance,

[20] *Poems of John Gay,* Introductory Memoir, pp. lv-lvi. By mistake Bluff Bob is called Whiff Bob.

and whom he married after the death of Lady Walpole. Croker, the editor, says the affair "gave peculiar poignancy to the satire of the Beggar's Opera, where Macheath, Lucy, and Polly reminded the public of Walpole, his lady and Molly Skerrit."[21] We have, besides the general controversy of the girls over Macheath, the speech of Peachum in which he says that Bob Booty "spends his Life among Women." In addition, if Peachum is made to represent Walpole in the quarrel scene with Townshend, in the form of Lockit,[22] it should be remembered that the thief-taker several times hints at his relations with other women.

The quarrel between the two ministers, discussed by Cooke, is well illustrated by the text of the play. If it preceded 1728, it could easily have furnished a third source for allusion to Walpole. The ministerial power was shared between Walpole and Townshend, just about as Peachum and Lockit "go halves in *Macheath*" and share other matters of mutual concern. The fact that Townshend was Walpole's brother-in-law might account for the expression of "Brother" which both Peachum and Lockit employ. In Scene x, Act II, where the two rogues have the disagreement, Lockit uses this term four times, and Peachum six. In Scene v, Act III, where there is a similar dialogue, Lockit and Peachum each use the term three times. It should also be noticed that Peachum really starts the dispute, as did Walpole in the contention with Townshend. The dialogue in several places is suggestive of similar relations between the ministers. Peachum says, "Indeed, indeed, Brother, we must punctually pay our Spies, or we shall have no Information." Lockit says, "Is this Language to me, Sirrah—who have sav'd you from the Gallows, Sirrah!" Peachum finally proposes peace on peculiar grounds—"We shall both be Losers in the Dispute—for you know we have it in our Power to hang each other." It is not necessary, of course, to make the Peachum-Lockit quarrel a direct tracing of a Walpole-Townshend quarrel in actual life; it could as easily be a representation of the general state of affairs, with a hint at a particular instance that was rumored abroad.

However Walpole may have been satirized in *The Beggar's Opera,*

[21] Hervey's *Memoirs,* I, 115, note.

[22] See, however, the quotation from the *Key to Beggar's Opera,* printed *ante,* p. 181.

it seems certain that the hits at him are not to be limited to any one character. The evidence in favor of direct allusions points to a rotating satire in at least three different persons of the play, Robin of Bagshot, Peachum, and Macheath. For this reason it is difficult to locate definite lines in portrayal of the Minister and easy to go astray in the search for political parallels in connection with him. The interesting point is that whether Gay meant Walpole or not, the various shoes seem to have fitted him remarkably well. At the same time, circumstances imply that the Minister understood for whom the satire was intended.

Just how far the life and character of Walpole should be connected with *The Beggar's Opera* will never be known. It is interesting to speculate, however, as to the possible part of Gay's apparently inconsequential musical comedy in the downfall of the notorious English statesman. Walpole was already unpopular in 1728, although his longest record of public dishonesty covers a later time; and the dramatist's satire, finding a ready sympathy in many minds, cannot be dismissed abruptly when one considers the question of public sentiment (especially after the prohibition of *Polly,* and the licensing act) leading to the fall of the Minister in 1742.

CHAPTER XVIII

SOCIAL SATIRE

FOR evidence of the comprehensive satire in *The Beggar's Opera* on many phases of society we need not go outside the play itself. The text is full of open examples, only a small number of which have been assembled here to illustrate the leading departments of the general attack. Much of the wit of the piece is in clever squibs at the vices, fashions, and follies of men. Gay's exposure of high life by picturing the low as equally bad, though equally refined, may be due primarily to his disappointment in failing to receive favor from a branch of the society he laughs at here; but his whole purpose must not be taken too seriously. As has been said of the sequel, *Polly*, which continues the satire in a similar, though a broader, vein:

> If it were possible to accept as a serious social creed Gay's satire of society, it might be held to exhibit some foreshadowings of Rousseau's doctrines. But the *saeva indignatio* which had just fired Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) had only a mock echo in Gay. If Gay be concluded to have brought an indictment against the corruptions of civilized society, he was content to have the case laughed out of court.[1]

If we believe in the whimsical, ironical humor of *The Beggar's Opera*, we can better appreciate the picture of the faults, foibles, and peculiarities of life presented in the double characterization. The play is, in this sense, a comedy of manners, decorated with music and the atmosphere of subtle burlesque. No crude, coarse attack on society is ever made. The secret of Gay's idea seems bound up with the wit of such statements as "the lower Sort of People have their Vices in a degree as well as the Rich," and "it is difficult to determine whether (in the fashionable Vices) the fine Gentlemen imitate the Gentlemen of the Road, or the Gentlemen of the Road the fine Gentlemen." With no apology whatever, the reversal of the social order is complete.

The thought of the general corruption of the world leads the gang

[1] Nettleton, *English Drama*, p. 194.

of highwaymen to indulge in socialistic doctrines with which the somewhat aristocratic John Gay, in serious mood, was not entirely out of sympathy. A just division of the commodities of life is a favorite topic of their conversation. That man is an animal of prey is openly acknowledged by Peachum. Friendship is the common instrument of personal advantage. Lockit tells his daughter that if she would not be looked upon as a fool she "should never do any thing but upon the Foot of Interest." Peachum tells his wife that they "must comply with the Customs of the World, and make Gratitude give way to Interest." The supreme stroke in this general vein is the speech of Macheath when he hears the news of the treachery of Jemmy Twitcher: " 'Tis a plain Proof that the World is all alike, and that even our Gang can no more trust one another than other People."

As a special class, the quality comes under close inspection. Much of the best banter in the opera is leveled at the "fine Gentlemen" and the "fine Ladies." Polly has violated her mother's social code "because forsooth she would do like the Gentry." Macheath hopes that one of his hussies does not "want the Repairs of Quality, and lay on Paint." "Just the Excuse of the fine Ladies!", the vanity of "other fine Ladies," "You should leave those to your Betters"—these are commonplaces of the dialogue. In direct comparison with the quality, Gay sets his low-life characters, who talk of their occupations, successes, hopes, fears, loves, and honor, in a philosophical style that would rival the most elevated conversation of the upper classes. Politeness is a characteristic trait. The women of the town gossip genteelly about their favorite men, their good or bad fortune, their handling of laces, and other topics of current interest. Their fashionable dispute at the end of the tavern scene is conducted with wonderful ceremony and feminine poise. The gang of robbers, in turn, gossip about their favorite kind of money, and their several stations for the daily work of honest exaction. Their criminal aristocracy is never to be doubted. Peachum, like a true commercial agent, speaks about his "other Office," "the Article of Exportation," and "the Gentlemen, who venture their Lives for the Goods." The results of the petit larceny of Crook-finger'd Jack are nicely termed "the Fruits of his leisure Hours."

The ideas of honor, family pride, and "the Rules of Decency" ex-

pressed by the Peachums are admirably presented. As persons of some consequence the thief-taker and his wife have a right to insist upon a certain social code and upon the appearance of good character. "Then all the Hopes of our Family are gone for ever and ever!" exclaims Mrs. Peachum when she hears that Polly has married a highwayman, instead of a desirable "Person of Distinction." The standards of the family descend even to Filch, who declares that he would not forfeit his honor by betraying anybody.

In connection with the hero highwayman the idea of honor rises to an inherent trait of character. Macheath's integrity is emphasized. As a man of honor he considers "his Word is as good as his Bond." As a man of honor, also, he can carry out his romantic desires in the most chivalrous, as well as the freest, fashion. It is in this double significance of honor that Gay gets his choicest parallels. Macheath's character is not self-bestowed. Peachum hesitates "to take off a great Man" like Polly's husband. Lockit calls his prisoner "Noble Captain." Plainly this fellow is as good as the rest of the robbers of mankind.

Of all the professions, the law is most highly satirized in *The Beggar's Opera*. This was well recognized in the eighteenth century. In a letter of 1778, Hannah More, relating how she went to see the play of *Percy,* but, with other moralists, was caught attending a performance of *The Beggar's Opera,* says:

> But the best of all was Sir William Ashurst, who sat in a side box, and was perhaps one of the first judges who ever figured away at the "Beggar's Opera," that strong and bitter satire against the professions, and particularly his.[2]

The following examples from the text give evidence of Gay's ridicule: p. 1, "A Lawyer is an honest Employment, so is mine," and " 'tis but fitting that we should protect and encourage Cheats, since we live by them"; p. 2, "For Suits of Love, like Law, are won by Pay"; p. 13, all of song xi, with the speech following; p. 17, "You might sooner tear . . . a Fee from a Lawyer"; p. 25, all of song vi. There are also sly references to the doctor, the surgeon, and the divine.

Another department of Gay's social satire is directed at the contemporary ideas of marriage, widowhood, and the keeping of mistresses. When Polly says she did not marry Macheath "(as 'tis the

[2] *Memoirs,* under date of 1778.

Fashion) cooly and deliberately for Honour or Money," but because she loved him, Mrs. Peachum, who considers marriage a great blemish, as is shown by her own example, is shocked—"I thought the Girl had been better bred." She does not believe that "a Wench who is just married" is to be congratulated. She does not see how her daughter can "support the Expence of a Husband," though she could have excused a frailty in the way of intrigue, as do "the very best Families." As to marriage promises, Macheath is a past master in the art of inventing, if not fulfilling, them. His "four Wives more" of the final scenes prove that, without the arguments of Polly and Lucy. The highwayman knows that it is his privilege to "say a thousand things . . . (as all Gentlemen do) that mean nothing," to divert himself. So lightly does he consider Lucy's claims to be "an honest Woman" that he assures her he is a husband in "ev'ry respect but the Form," which may be pronounced over them later. A wife receives little attention, according to the experience of Polly, but at the same time she is not compelled, according to the dictum of Mrs. Peachum, to "love only her Husband," for there never was a marriage that made a woman "less followed by other Men."

Widowhood is presented as the height of matrimonial achievement. The hanging of a husband furnishes "most excellent Chances for a Wife." The "common Views of a Gentlewoman" in marriage look to the good fortune of "a Jointure and of being a Widow." This, Peachum tells his daughter, "is the whole Scheme and Intention of all Marriage Articles. The comfortable Estate of Widow-hood, is the only hope that keeps up a Wife's Spirits. Where is the Woman who would scruple to be a Wife, if she had it in her Power to be a Widow whenever she pleas'd?" Polly's stubbornness is almost selfish—"What would many a Wife give for such an Opportunity!" Sorrow upon the death of a husband has gone entirely out of fashion. The only remedy for Lucy, too, says Lockit, is for her to buy "Weeds, and be cheerful." Macheath seems to recognize in the contention of his two loves the laudable object of seeking the credit of being thought his widow.

Much is made of the practice of keeping. This is partly due to the demand for realism in the several situations, but it is featured mainly for the benefit of the men of fashion, some of them Gay's opponents, who openly associated with characters of the Jenny Diver type. It is

possible that the enemies of Walpole applied even some of the most general material to the private life of the minister of state.

The worship and power of money do not escape from Gay's treatment of influences in the social scale. The most of his characters, reflecting an upper stratum, consider, with Macheath, that "Money well tim'd, and properly apply'd, will do any thing"; or, with Peachum, that "Money . . . is the true Fuller's Earth for Reputations, there is not a Spot or a Stain but what it can take out. A rich Rogue now-a-days, is fit Company for any Gentleman." Song xv of Act II contains a financial recipe for success. The final Beggar-Player scene cleverly suggests that the rich are no more vicious than their inferiors, and leaves the comparison hanging there.

The extreme fashion of quadrille is plainly ridiculed. The Peachums know the game as well as their betters, and so do the highwaymen. Bob Booty is coming to play it with Polly and her mother. Macheath, in the most pathetic situation, at the end of the first act, assures Polly that no power, no force, can tear him from her, using as his strongest figure—"You might sooner tear . . . any Woman from *Quadrille*." Mrs. Peachum finds that "handsome Daughters" take "as much Pleasure in cheating a Father and Mother, as in cheating at Cards." From such references Gay leads to prominent mention of gamesters and gambling. Mat of the Mint is made to say: "Of all Mechanics, of all servile Handycrafts-men, a Gamester is the vilest. But yet, as many of the Quality are of the Profession, he is admitted amongst the politest Company." Ben Budge grieves because his chief, a highwayman, must condescend to "herd with Gamesters."

Gay finds a chance to play even upon the custom of fashionable drinking. Mrs. Peachum, like any fine lady, talks of the cordial she keeps for her own use. Polly confesses that her mother always "drinks double the Quantity whenever she is out of Order." Lucy, offering her rival the fatal draught, says, "Not the greatest Lady in the Land could have better in her Closet, for her own private drinking." When Polly refuses the glass Lucy protests that the girl is "so squeamishly affected about taking a Cup of Strong-Waters as a Lady before Company. . . . Brandy and Men (though Women love them never so well) are always taken by us with some Reluctance—unless

'tis in private." The widespread evil of gin-drinking around 1728 is truthfully reflected in this statement of Lucy: "I run no Risque; for I can lay her Death upon the Ginn, and so many dye of that naturally that I shall never be call'd in Question."

CHAPTER XIX

LITERARY BURLESQUE

THE literary burlesque in *The Beggar's Opera* divides itself into three classes, not mutually exclusive: burlesque of heroic drama and sentimental comedy; burlesque of the affectedly tender songs of the period; and burlesque of contemporary romance. Such material is apparently not specialized, although in its own time the piece may have been taken as hitting directly at certain plays, songs, and stories. For us the general fact remains that many lines in *The Beggar's Opera* seem to embody travesty on an elegant style, passionate speeches, and pathetic situations. Some of them might be called appropriate to-day.

It is this atmosphere of burlesque that gives the play its peculiar tone. Unfortunately, during its long stage history, *The Beggar's Opera* was often taken too seriously, both in plot and characterization. For instance, Gay's use of low life in order to mirror the high furnished peculiar grounds for the fear of immorality which persisted long after 1728. As the "Orpheus of Highwaymen," Gay would hardly have considered his *dramatis personae* detrimental to the welfare of the world! In spirit, *The Beggar's Opera* is burlesque, not melodrama or sentimental comedy; the ending is proof enough of that. If satire and burlesque were absent, the play, with its disreputable characters, might indeed be revolting. With both these agencies present, it becomes picturesque and even attractive. The burlesque is not broadly comic; it is intellectual, and elusive without proper understanding. The chief drollery comes in the simplicity and solemnity with which the business of the piece is conducted. The editor of Cumberland's reprint of 1829 calls *The Beggar's Opera* the finest burlesque in the language; and in view of the method adopted by Gay, which is not parody on another play or direct caricature of people in high life, the remark is not far from the truth. The piece belongs with *The Rehearsal* and *Tom Thumb* as a work which is largely the by-product, rather than the product, of literature, but it attains, nevertheless, an art of its own.

Gay's ridicule of Italian opera shades off easily and almost imperceptibly into burlesque of heroic drama or sentimental comedy. In the latter, we can catch the general similarity, without being able to locate definite parallels. Gay had pointed in this direction with his *The What d'ye Call It* (1715), which had burlesqued English tragedies, especially Otway's *Venice Preserved,* just as he points ahead in *The Beggar's Opera* to Fielding and Carey. His ballad opera, along with pantomime and farce-burlesque, became a factor of the opposition against the steadily growing current of sentimental comedy, which had been made prominent by Cibber and Steele. To Gay must be given the credit of at least helping to cure convention and assisting in the restoration of the sanity of English comedy effectively completed by Goldsmith and Sheridan. In close connection with the ridicule of the artificiality and absurdity of much in sentimental comedy, the new musical play can be seen to take off the grand declamation and fine frenzy of heroic dramas, like those of Dryden and Lee. Such ridicule is with difficulty distinguished from that against Italian opera, or, for that matter, English serious opera itself.

Sentimentality in drama is carried by Gay to a ludicrous extreme, mainly in the soft and tender dialogues of Macheath and his two ladies. The soliloquy of Polly in Act I is fine parody. The closely following speeches and songs, in the elaborate and cleverly heroic parting scene, illustrate the idea at its best.[1] One plain case of lofty verse interposed in the midst of the dialogue gives proof of the spirit of the dramatist:

> One Kiss and then—one Kiss—begone—farewell.

Tears instead of laughter furnish the proper element of comedy in many of the situations. In fact, there is little humor in which the characters themselves take part. Upon the stage, events move forward to "a down-right deep Tragedy," while the audience is left to interpret as it pleases. Lucy answers her father's "Whence come you, Hussy?" with the simple speech, "My Tears might answer that Question." Her creed is just as artless: "One can't help Love; one can't cure it." Polly shows her true devotion to her husband in a single

[1] See all of pages 16-18.

utterance: "Was a Rope ever intended for this Neck!—O let me throw my Arms about it, and throttle thee with Love!" Similar sentiment is found in the final scene in Act II, where Macheath persuades Lucy to set him free. In the absence of their common lover, the two girls indulge in sympathetic acknowledgments that both "have been too fond."

Mock pathos and tragedy are revealed in the gradual development of the play; had not the Beggar changed his piece, the opera would have plunged at last into the deepest gloom. Some of the rarest burlesque comes in the viewpoint of Macheath in the midst of the most direful straits, with "neither the Chance of Love or Money for another Escape." The cheerful highwayman, almost as if a part of the audience, remains practically outside the tragic atmosphere, enjoying the whole situation, with a sly wink at the boxes. Pity and fear are not aroused in his optimistic soul. He can hear, unabashed, the excited Lucy say, "O *Macheath!* thou hast robb'd me of my Quiet . . . to see thee tortur'd would give me pleasure"; or listen, deliberately, to her lamentation, "Oh Sir!—my Father's hard Heart is not to be soften'd, and I am in the utmost Despair." The dialogue between Polly and Lucy leading up to the song of "Cease your Funning," in Act II, is full of pretended pathos as humorous as the quarrel is active. Lucy's planned revenge, when she is torn at once by "Jealousy, Rage, Love and Fear," is worthy of the villain in a tragedy of blood. The dark design of giving ratsbane, in strong waters, to the unsuspecting Polly is as seriously described as the situation of Macheath in the condemned hold, awaiting his death. When two daughters kneel to their respective fathers, begging for mercy, the dramatic suspense is at its height. A moment later, for intentional anticlimax, Polly and Lucy are allowed to make the somewhat trivial and unemotional statements, "Sure there is nothing so charming as Musick! I'm fond of it to distraction!", and "There is nothing moves one so much as a great Man in Distress."

Conscious moralizing and sentimentality in drama are both dealt significant blows in the conclusion of the opera. The Beggar confesses his original scheme: "To make the Piece perfect, I was for doing strict poetical Justice"; and, "Had the Play remain'd, as I at first intended, it would have carried a most excellent Moral." This

moral, when we hear it briefly stated, is so packed with waggish satire that we submit at once to the loss of the intended object lesson. Instead, after the turmoil of the scenes and the affliction of the characters, we are ready to assist the burlesque by siding with the Player in the demand for a happy ending. The strain has been great enough—"let the Prisoner be brought back to his Wives in Triumph," even if there are no grounds whatever for reprieve. The absurd climax of *The Beggar's Opera* is unique in English drama, and especially so in travesty of the sudden turn of fortune frequently lugged into the closing scenes of too many plays on the English stage.

Many of the songs, while carrying out the general idea of burlesque, and helping to give a substitute for the music of Italian opera, if not a parody on it, are apparently modeled on the type of the affectedly tender lyrics which were then much in vogue. Examples of such elevated, figurative, amorous verse are found in the following songs: iv, viii, x, xiii, xiv, xv, xvi, and xvii of Act I; x and xxii of Act II; and ii, vii, xxiv, and xxv of Act III. Some of these pieces are slight parodies on the original words. Gay gets a peculiarly good effect by mixing among these artificial lyrics a liberal supply of homely songs like "Our Polly is a sad Slut" and "Thus when a good Huswife sees a Rat," besides such vigorous ballads as those of the tavern scene.

There are also slight indications that Gay, in his general burlesque of Macheath's heroism and strong passion, as well as of the tender love of Polly and Lucy, had in mind some of the romantic tales of the day or the fashionable reading of them. Once there is an open reference. Polly, in gushing affection, trustingly assures her lover, "Nay, my Dear, I have no Reason to doubt you, for I find in the Romance you lent me, none of the great Heroes were ever false in Love." Macheath, as a fine gentleman, is thus discovered to be a reader of romance. Possibly in imitation of the literary knights he is now playing his part upon the road. The highwayman's pledge to Polly, perfectly suited to his profession, seems to come directly from the realm of romance into the prosaic setting of Peachum's house: "Suspect my Honour, my Courage, suspect any thing but my Love. —May my Pistols miss Fire, and my Mare slip her Shoulder while I am pursu'd, if I ever forsake thee!"

It is not sensible to insist strongly upon the separate classes of literary burlesque in *The Beggar's Opera*. The fact that many of the examples are general, rather than specific, forbids a rigid analysis. The fusion of all of these classes is a distinct characteristic of the play and of Gay's broad scheme of ridicule.

CHAPTER XX

POLLY, A SEQUEL

LIKE many a sequel, the second part of *The Beggar's Opera,* as it was often called and printed, did not receive the same good fortune as its better-half. Prepared in the first flush of Gay's new popularity, *Polly* struck a snag at the end of the very year of his big success in London. It got no farther than a planned rehearsal, being ordered suppressed by the Lord Chamberlain, without a definite explanation for his action. For that reason its history must be considered directly in connection with the early record of the other play.

It was only natural that the achievement of *The Beggar's Opera* should bring Gay visions of a sequel which would duplicate the original performance. Having nothing to lose and something to gain, he was ready to risk a second part. The stir of antagonism aroused against the former piece, however, could hardly have allowed him to be wholly off his guard when the prohibition of *Polly* came. It would be interesting to find out whether or not Gay's circle of friends was as anxious about the fate of the sequel as it had been the year before over the outcome of *The Beggar's Opera.* No doubt Pope, Swift, and the rest were confident now that the fortunate poet could repeat his miracle of January and find another hearty reception, trusting to luck that the government would never interfere. At any rate, it seems unwise for Gay to have attempted to follow *The Beggar's Opera* so quickly and possibly detract attention from the play still so hilariously accepted in London; but human nature can easily be made responsible for the venture, just as politics can be laid against the failure of his plans.

Little is known concerning the composition of *Polly* or the preparations for production. On December 2, 1728, after his attack of fever, Gay wrote to Swift of his hope that with the care of Dr. Arbuthnot he would soon be well, and said that he was anxious to go out to arrange for the performance of his new opera, a second part of *The Beggar's Opera,* written at Bath. This would indicate

that he had lost no time in constructing his new dramatic work, apparently early during the summer.[1] We know, from letters of 1728, that he was in Bath by May 7,[2] and was still there in August.[3] The play was officially forbidden on December 12, when the manuscript was returned by the Lord Chamberlain.

The Preface to *Polly*,[4] written by the author in self-defense, to establish the idea of his persecution, will best explain the proceeding from beginning to end:[5]

After Mr. *Rich* and I were agreed upon terms and conditions for bringing this Piece on the stage, and that every thing was ready for a Rehearsal; The Lord Chamberlain sent an order from the country to prohibit Mr. *Rich* to suffer any Play to be rehears'd upon his stage till it had been first of all supervis'd by his Grace. As soon as Mr. *Rich* came from his Grace's secretary (who had sent for him to receive the before-mentioned order) he came to my lodgings and acquainted me with the orders he had received.

Upon the Lord Chamberlain's coming to town, I was confined by sickness, but in four or five days I went abroad on purpose to wait upon his Grace with a faithful and genuine copy of this Piece, excepting the erratas of the transcriber.

It was transcribed in great haste by Mr. *Stede* the Prompter of the Playhouse, that it might be ready against his Grace's return from the country: As my illness at that time would not allow me to read it over, I since find in it many small faults, and here and there a line or two omitted. But lest it should be said I had made any one alteration from the copy I deliver'd to the Lord Chamberlain: I have caused every error in the said copy to be printed (litteral faults excepted) and have taken notice of every omission. I have also pointed out every amendment I have made upon the revisal of my own copy for the Press, that the reader may at one view see what alterations and amendments have been made. . . .

Excepting these errors and emendations, this Edition is a true and faithful Copy as I my-self in my own hand writing delivered it to Mr. *Rich*, and afterwards to the Lord Chamberlain, for the truth of which I appeal to his Grace.

As I have heard several suggestions and false insinuations concerning the copy: I take this occasion in the most solemn manner to affirm, that the very copy I delivered to Mr. *Rich* was written in my own hand some months before at the *Bath* from my own first foul blotted papers; from this, that for the Playhouse was transcribed, from whence the above-mention'd Mr. *Stede* copied that

[1] See Gay's Preface for a statement ("some months before at the Bath") that helps to place the time of the composition of *Polly*.

[2] Mrs. Blount to Swift.

[3] Mrs. Howard to Gay.

[4] Dated March 25, 1729.

[5] Quoted from first ed., 1729.

which I delivered to the Lord Chamberlain, and excepting my own foul blotted papers; I do protest I know of no other copy whatsoever, than those I have mention'd.

The Copy I gave into the hands of Mr. *Rich* had been seen before by several Persons of the greatest distinction and veracity, who will be ready to do me the honour and justice to attest it; so that not only by them, but by Mr. *Rich* and Mr. *Stede,* I can (against all insinuation or positive affirmation) prove in the most clear and undeniable manner, if occasion required, what I have here upon my own honour and credit asserted. The Introduction indeed was not shown to the Lord Chamberlain, which, as I had not then quite settled, was never transcribed in the Playhouse copy.

'Twas on *Saturday* morning *December 7th, 1728.* that I waited upon the Lord Chamberlain; I desir'd to have the honour of reading the Opera to his Grace, but he order'd me to leave it with him, which I did upon expectation of having it return'd on the Monday following, but I had it not 'till *Thursday December 12,* when I receiv'd it from his Grace with this answer; that it was not allow'd to be acted, but commanded to be supprest. This was told me in general without any reasons assign'd, or any charge against me of my having given any particular offence.

Since this prohibition I have been told that I am accused, in general terms, of having written many disaffected libels and seditious pamphlets. As it hath ever been my utmost ambition (if that word may be us'd upon this occasion) to lead a quiet and inoffensive life, I thought my innocence in this particular would never have requir'd a justification; and as this kind of writing is, what I have ever detested and never practic'd, I am persuaded so groundless a calumny can never be believ'd but by those who do not know me. But when general aspersions of this sort have been cast upon me, I think my-self call'd upon to declare my principles; and I do with the strictest truth affirm, that I am as loyal a subject and as firmly attach'd to the present happy establishment as any of those who have the greatest places or pensions. I have been inform'd too, that in the following Play, I have been charg'd with writing immoralities; that it is fill'd with slander and calumny against particular great persons, and that Majesty it-self is endeavour'd to be brought into ridicule and contempt.

As I knew that every one of these charges was in every point absolutely false and without the least grounds, at first I was not at all affected by them; but when I found they were still insisted upon, and that particular passages which were not in the Play were quoted and propagated to support what had been suggested, I could no longer bear to lye under these false accusations; so by printing it, I have submitted and given up all present views of profit which might accrue from the stage, which undoubtedly will be some satisfaction to the worthy gentlemen who have treated me with so much candour and humanity, and represented me in such favourable colours.

But as I am conscious to my-self that my only intention was to lash in general the reigning and fashionable vices, and to recommend and set virtue in as amiable a light as I could; to justify and vindicate my own character, I

thought my-self obliged to print the Opera without delay in the manner I have done.

As the Play was principally design'd for representation, I hope when it is read it will be considered in that light; And when all that hath been said against it shall appear to be intirely misunderstood or misrepresented; if, some time hence, it should be permitted to appear on the stage, I think it necessary to acquaint the publick, that as far as a contract of this kind can be binding; I am engag'd to Mr. *Rich* to have it represented upon his Theatre.

This version of the story, from Gay's own pen, belies the statement of some of the older dramatic histories that the production was suddenly stopped by the Lord Chamberlain after the piece was in rehearsal at Lincoln's Inn Fields, almost implying that he, or his agent, had appeared in person and with uplifted hand called a halt in dialogue or music in true dramatic style. Rich may have secretly rehearsed the piece after the general edict mentioned by Gay; but it is more likely that the demands of the royal censor were complied with and that the cast, already picked, had not gone through the lines together.

The *Biographia Dramatica* assigns the cause for the arbitrary action of the government against *Polly*, and since we have no authentic contemporary source of definite information the account given there may well be quoted in full:

There cannot be a stronger proof of the barbarous rage of factions, than the Lord Chamberlain's refusing a license for the representation of this piece. The Duke of Grafton, grandfather to the present, who was then Lord Chamberlain, was importuned, entreated, and pressed on both sides, The Whigs in power, headed by Walpole and his friends, had the address to represent Gay to Geo. II. as disaffected to his government. On the other hand, all the Tories, and discontented and displaced Whigs, contradicted this assertion. They insisted, that Walpole was leading the King and Hanover family to its ruin, by introducing a system of corruption, instead of relying on the affection of his subjects; and that it was the political tendency of *The Beggar's Opera*, as exposing that system, not the pretended immoral tendency of the piece, that raised the Court clamour against him. The Queen was for some time divided; and Grafton, who was a good-natured man, of moderate talents, was just on the point of giving way to the entreaties of his friends, in favour of Gay; when Walpole, getting a hint of it, went privately to the Queen, who went to the King directly, and prevailed on him to interfere. The King sent directly to the Chamberlain; so that when Gay came to know Grafton's final result, he met with a positive refusal, without any specific reason assigned. He offered to read the piece to His Grace, in order that His Grace might point out the objectionable passages, on

purpose to alter or totally expunge them; but the Chamberlain's secret instructions being positive and direct, Gay was compelled, after a deal of time and struggle, to give way to the minister's resentment.

The story has been variously told, but we can accept the general content of the foregoing account as substantially representative of what may have happened. The last part does not agree with Gay's own statement of the time of his offering to read the piece, the short delay in having the manuscript returned, and the quiet manner of notification, but the other details would easily fall in line.

Politics, not immorality, kept *Polly* off the stage. The situation seems to have been about as follows: the Whig administration, led by Walpole, had heard of a sequel to *The Beggar's Opera,* or at least another play by Gay, and influenced or instructed the Lord Chamberlain to issue his edict to the effect that no play was to be rehearsed at Lincoln's Inn Fields "till it had been first of all supervis'd by his Grace." What such supervision was intended to be hardly need be figured out; it is possible that the Duke of Grafton never read the manuscript of *Polly,* and probable that he did not if there was in advance a secret understanding with the King. Rockstro, a musical historian, says that "the plot was so unfit for representation that the Lord Chamberlain prohibited the performance."[6] He would doubtless have been much more correct in saying that the report of a new play bearing Gay's name was so unfit for the comfort of the Walpole circle that the Lord Chamberlain was called on to exercise his traditional power, long before the licensing act of 1737. Lord Hervey, writing close to this time,[7] is so staunch a courtier that he finds ugliness and abuse in *Polly* and seems to sympathize with Sir Robert in being unwilling to "suffer himself to be produced for thirty nights together upon the stage in the person of a highwayman" and in prohibiting at every playhouse this "Theatrical Craftsman." Genest comes out plainly in saying "there can be no doubt of its having been forbidden to be acted, not so much for any thing contained in it, as out of a mean, dirty, pitiful spirit of revenge for the honest and open satire of the Beggar's Opera."[8] In this connection

[6] *General Hist. of Music.*
[7] *Memoirs.* Hervey died in 1743.
[8] III, 245.

we may wonder why Walpole, if responsible for the suppression of the unacted *Polly,* took no measures against the acted companion opera so merrily running along in a second season.

The *Polly* prohibition, though without just motive, was not irregular. The Lord Chamberlain, under his office, had authority over the stage, but had seldom used it, the unpopularity of such interference having checked free use of political power in theatrical affairs. As early as 1715 mention is made of the possibility of a ban on a piece by Gay. Pope and Gay, in a letter to Caryll, on March 15, discussing an attack by Thomas Burnet, say, "Yet is there not a proclamation issued forth for the burning of Homer and the Pope by the common hangman, nor is the What d'ye Call it yet silenced by the Lord Chamberlain." In 1735, when a bill for restraining the number of playhouses was proposed, and Walpole tried to have inserted a clause increasing the authority of the Lord Chamberlain, the author of the measure, Sir John Barnard, mentioning *Polly* as a specific case, objected to the amendment on the ground that this official had always possessed great power and had sometimes exercised it wantonly.[9] With the licensing act of 1737 the former powers of the Lord Chamberlain were definitely confirmed and enlarged. In 1739, Brooke's *Gustavus Vasa,* which had already been in rehearsal at Drury Lane, was prohibited because of supposed satire against Walpole. The year before there was a broad riot at the Haymarket theatre, following restrictions, under the licensing law, against certain English actors in favor of some French players; but the time for such a demonstration of disapproval was not ripe in 1729, even though the people were probably more anxious to see *Polly* than any other play of the year. The fact that the prohibition of the second part of *The Beggar's Opera* was executed so speedily and with so little opposition is plain evidence of strong political backing.

A new angle to the *Polly* situation is found in the charge against Cibber, who is suspected by early report to have maliciously contrived to have Gay's plans for a sequel performance arrested. The anonymous biographer of Quin, writing in 1766,[10] records the following near-contemporary comment:

[9] See Fowell and Palmer's *Censorship in England,* p. 134.

[10] *Life of Quin,* reprint of 1887, p. 26.

It was then generally thought that his [Cibber's] jealousy of Gay, and the high opinion he entertained of his new piece, had operated so strongly, as to make him set every engine in motion to get the sequel of the Beggar's Opera, called Polly, suppressed, in order to engross the town entirely to Love in a Riddle. Whether Cibber did or did not bestir himself in this affair, it is certain that Gay and Rich had the mortification to see all their hopes of a succeeding harvest blasted, by the Lord Chamberlain's absolute prohibition of it, after it had been rehearsed[11] and was just ready to bring out.

The success of *The Beggar's Opera* and the decisive failure of *Love in a Riddle,* written in close imitation of Gay's comedy, really may have made Cibber jealous. It is not necessary to believe, however, though it is easy to suppose, that the manager of Drury Lane, who had refused Gay's play in 1727, used his influence to get *Polly* forbidden, even if the disaster of his own production might have been largely due to the resentment of the public at being denied a sequel to its favorite dramatic diversion.

Cibber's own statement may be true, after all:[12]

The same Author [Gay], the next year, had, according to the Laws of the Land transported his Heroe to the West-Indies, in a Second Part to the Beggar's Opera; but it so happen'd, to the Surprize of the Publick, this Second Part was forbid to come upon the Stage! Various were the Speculations, upon this act of Power: Some thought that the Author, others that the Town, was hardly dealt with; a third sort, who perhaps had envy'd him the Success of his first Part, affirm'd, when it was printed, that, whatever the Intention might be, the Fact was in his Favour, that he had been a greater Gainer, by Supscriptions to his Copy, than he could have been by a bare Theatrical Presentation. Whether any Part of these Opinions were true, I am not concerned to determine, or consider. But how they affected me, I am going to tell you. Soon after this Prohibition, my Performance was to come upon the Stage, at a time, when many People were out of Humour at the late Disappointment, and seem'd willing to lay hold of any Pretence of making a Reprizal. Great Umbrage was taken, that I was permitted, to have the whole Town to myself, by this absolute Forbiddance of what, they had more mind to have been entertain'd with. And, some few days before my Bawble was acted, I was inform'd, that a strong Party would be made against it. This Report I slighted, as not conceiving why it should be true; and when I was afterwards told, what was the pretended Provocation of this Party, I slighted it, still more, as having less Reason to suppose, any Persons could believe me capable (had I the Power) of giving such a Provocation. The Report, it seems, that had run against me, was this: That, to make way for the Success of my own Play, I had privately found

[11] A statement without foundation.

[12] *Apology,* Chapter VII.

means, or made Interest, that the Second Part of the Beggar's Opera, might be suppressed. What an involuntary Compliment did the Reporters of this Falsehood make to me? to suppose me of Consideration enough to Influence a great Officer of State to gratify the Spleen, or Envy of a Comedian, so far as to rob the Publick of an innocent Diversion (if it were such) that none, but that cunning Comedian, might be suffered to give them. This is so very gross a Supposition, that it needs only its own senseless Face, to confound it; let that alone, then, be my Defence against it.

Cibber tells of the failure of his play on the very first night, and then he adds:

But if I had no occasion to complain of the Reception it met with, from its *quieted* Audience, sure it can be no great Vanity to impute its Disgraces chiefly, to that severe Resentment, which a groundless Report of me had inflam'd.

The joint incidents of Gay's disappointment and Cibber's failure are treated in *Fog's Weekly Journal,* February 8, 1729, under the title of *An Epigram:*

Two Accidents the weekly Bills have mis'd,
One *Poet Muzzled,*—and another his'd.
Each from the Stage, and tow'ring Hopes cast down,
One by the C——, the other by the Town.
The one as much despis'd as t'other fear'd,
Philanthus damn'd by Tryal,—Gay unheard.
Philanthus with Corinthian Air had drawn
Corinthian Courage in primaeval Dawn.
Long with Corinthian Fools he kept the Field;
It cost a second night to make him yield.
Philanthus thou art safe, thy Tinker's Stroke
May grate the Ear, but never can provoke.
But he is truly dreaded who can fit
True Spartan Virtue, to Athenian Wit.

As is shown by the Preface to the printed *Polly,* Gay considered himself a political martyr and made capital out of the incident of prohibition. It is hard to tell whether his protest contained a sincere defense of his honesty or carried a veiled apology for what he had not succeeded in getting past the government. The effect on Gay, however, was genuinely serious, for illness from fever seized him almost immediately and kept him confined till March of the next year. The surprise and disappointment over the refusal of performance must have been a severe jolt to the dramatist who had practically got out

of a sick-bed to wait on the Lord Chamberlain. Even the success of *The Beggar's Opera,* now in a second season, could not serve as a sufficient tonic for the depression over his mistreatment or as an antidote for his actual physical malady. Since he never really recovered from this condition, it may be guessed with some degree of accuracy that the non-success of *Polly* helped to kill John Gay.

The story of the printing and the sale of *Polly* reflects the influence of the original ballad opera, as well as the political situation of the time. Before a single detail of the theatrical prohibition could be forgotten, Gay, though in poor health, speedily planned to publish the book of the forbidden play at his own risk, or rather at the risk of the Queensberrys, who became his ardent supporters on this occasion and practically gave him a home for the brief remainder of his life. It was a successful method of attracting attention to his persecution and getting the support of many people who could not find, or did not try to find, allusions in the book against the government. Those who had seen Gay's first part would be eager to read the sequel, and the reading of the latter by any one would be highly seasoned by the theatrical prohibition. Party feeling, also, was aroused by the act of the Lord Chamberlain, the supporters of the opposition coming to Gay's side, fanning the political flame, and incidentally boosting the *Polly* market, as well as sending *The Beggar's Opera* plenty of new patronage at the playhouse. Gay's fame was now at its height, even outstripping that which came with the climax of 1728. *Polly* on the stage surely would never have equaled its antecedent, but in print it made a successful companion piece for many years. Walpole could well have regretted his actual assistance in the way of publicity by his interference at Lincoln's Inn Fields.

The most exciting incident of the *Polly* sale happened when the Duchess of Queensberry, Gay's friend as well as patroness, warmly espoused the poet's cause and carried his claims into the court and under the very nose of the King. The subtle irony of her canvass for *Polly* within the royal palace, which would not welcome either Gay or a performance of *The Beggar's Opera,* is easier for us to relish than it was for those concerned. An early anecdote, recorded by Lord Hervey and others, tells how the King found the Duchess soliciting prominent members of his royal circle, and shortly after notified her verbally, by special messenger, that her presence at St. James's was

no longer desirable. Her written repartee on that occasion was consistent with her spirited personality. Soon afterwards the Duke of Queensberry resigned his two offices under the crown, and like his vivacious lady was not seen at the court for many years. Since the King and Queen, according to the Duchess, had not even read the play which became so much of a menace to them, the political background of the controversy quickly overshadows the satire originally penned by Gay. Of course it was too bold an action to brave the court with the work which had been declared hostile to the government; but it is safe to assume that the Queensberrys' support of the dramatist, not merely their agency for his book, cost them their position in royal society.

Two occasional poems celebrated the rebuke of Gay's pretty patroness and the fashionable scramble to buy the books. Of the first, *The Banish'd Beauty: or, A Fair Face in Disgrace,* there were at least three editions during 1729. The piece speaks of the "bright Exile" and her "Stout Antagonist," allusions to the Duchess of Queensberry and apparently Walpole. Mention is made of Macheath, and the idea suggested is that Gay should now leave his hero highwayman and write to soothe and cure the injured beauty of the Duchess. The other poem is *The Female Faction: or, the Gay Subscribers,* satirizing the poet's lady admirers and the fad of subscribing for his printed play. It speaks of Gay as "A Bard, as bulky in Renown, as Size," and tells how

> Deny'd Admission, on the Stage, in vain,
> Macheath shall still invite the Town again.

Gay is addressed as

> Thrice happy Poet! whose unrivall'd Lays
> Can *Hosts* of Ladies in thy Quarrel raise.

Then, by allusion, the author takes up some of the real patronesses of the dramatist, including the Duchess of Marlborough ("Great Almeria") and the Duchess of Queensberry. Of the latter he says:

> The gay Almanda let us now behold,
> In thy Defence, a lovely *banish'd* Scold.

After referring to the resignation of the Duke of Queensberry, the writer makes a comparison between Homer, who, when dead, was

claimed by several cities as a native son, and Gay, who receives his reward from the women: "And load Thee *living,* with *Renown* and Gold."

The writing and publication of *Polly* may have been indiscretions of authorship, but they afforded a very profitable financial investment. The first edition, issued in quarto, apparently in late March or early April, 1729, yielded greater income than the theatrical receipts would have been likely to bring. Even Swift miscalculated the result, for he had written to Pope on March 6 of that year:

> I hope he [Gay] does not intend to print his opera before it is acted; for I defy all your subscriptions to amount to 800 pounds. And yet I believe he lost as much more for want of human prudence.

Gay, alluding to the subscriptions already made, was able to write to Swift, on March 18, 1729, "You see my fortune increases by oppression." His friends had doubted the issue of *The Beggar's Opera,* and seem to have missed their guess a second time in the case of *Polly* when Gay turned out a lucky fellow, if not a good business man. As a matter of fact, Bowyer, the printer, put out 10,500 copies in one year, some of which sold for fabulous sums on subscription. Gay wrote to Swift on March 18, 1729:

> The play is now almost printed, with the music, words, and basses, engraved on thirty-one copper-plates, which, by my friends' assistance, has a possibility to turn greatly to my advantage. The Duchess of Marlborough has given me a hundred pounds for one copy; and others have contributed very handsomely.

Elijah Fenton wrote to Broome on March 12, 1729:

> Honest Gay is printing his contraband play by subscription, by which he will make an ample equivalent for its not being acted, if some few of the quality will follow the junior Duchess of Marlborough's example, who has subscribed 100 l.

The nature of the average advance subscription is shown by the following paragraph from *Applebee's Original Weekly Journal,* March 8, 1729:

> The Subscription, for the Sequel, or Second Part of the Beggar's Opera, which has made such a Noise here, is a Guinea each, and the same will be published with all convenient Speed.

It has been suggested that Gay, starting with subscriptions amounting to about £1,200, must have received from the publisher

enough to bring his total receipts from *Polly* up to almost £3,000.[13] Such an estimate may be borne out by the words of Gay's friends. Swift wrote to Pope on August 11, 1729, "I hope Mr. Gay will keep his 3,000 l and live on the interest without decreasing the principal one penny." Pope replied to Swift on October 9, 1729, "Mr. Gay assures me his 3,000 l is kept entire and sacred." If Gay had got royalties from the many pirated editions of *Polly,* issued soon after the original, and causing a series of lawsuits between 1729 and 1732, he would have become a wealthy man, indeed. At any rate, the profits under the unusual conditions of free advertising were enormous, and Gay must have found a fairly satisfactory recompense for the failure of his dramatic plans. *The Beggar's Opera* had made a snug little fortune; *Polly* added another. Truly, in the words of the Newgate comedy, "Money well tim'd, and properly apply'd, will do any thing."

When we read *Polly,* and scan its lines for new or continued political satire, we are justified in wondering why so simple and harmless a piece could provoke the wrath of the authorities and thereby be elevated to a hysterical prominence which, on its literary merits, it could never deserve. The satire of the sequel is so general in its application to the vices of mankind that we are bound to conclude that those who engineered the prohibition looked for particular thrusts and consequently pretended to find them. Ducat might possibly be construed to represent Walpole, but the similarity is not very striking. The satire is also largely social, only incidentally involving politics and the court, at which Gay was naturally resentful, as institutions of civilized society. In *Polly* the European planters and pirates, including the ex-highwayman Macheath, are pictured as deficient in morals when compared with the idealistic Indian gentlemen who have not been tainted by the depravities and selfishness of the so-called civilized world. Such satire, though conventional, is intense; but whereas *The Beggar's Opera,* with its English setting and its many specific references to local conditions, could easily be taken to apply to persons close to home, *Polly* is so cosmopolitan in tone that it becomes a universal satire on humanity. As to a direct attack on the Whig administration, it seems almost wholly innocent

[13] Courthope (*Hist. Eng. Poetry,* V, 149).

and inoffensive; the Walpole circle had no more to fear from this kind of social philosophy than it would from an ordinary Sunday sermon within the bounds of London and Westminster. Gay surely was writing to duplicate his own theatrical success rather than to score further his political opponents.

In both the Preface and the Introduction to *Polly,* Gay declares his intentions, which in this case, following the uproar about *The Beggar's Opera,* we might as well accept at face value. He plainly disavows references to officers of state, and labels his satire as an attempt "to lash in general the reigning and fashionable vices, and to recommend and set virtue in as amiable a light as I could." Admitting that some may think his satire "here and there is too free," he says he "attacks the vice and not the person." When the first Player asks, "But how can you hinder malicious applications?" the Poet replies:

> Let those answer for 'em who make 'em. I aim at no particular persons; my strokes are at vice in general: but if any men particularly vicious are hurt, I make no apology, but leave them to the cure of their flatterers.

Lord Hervey, who has already been referred to as a staunch courtier, asserts in his *Memoirs* that Gay, out of revenge, after the interdiction of the *Polly* performance "zested the work with some supplemental invectives and resolved to print it by subscription." This idea is found repeated several times during the eighteenth century; but there is no definite proof, except a possible hint in a letter by Swift to Gay, written from Dublin on March 19, 1729:

> I had never much hopes of your vamped play, although Mr. Pope seemed to have, and although it were ever so good; but you should have done like the parsons, and changed your text, I mean your title, and the names of the persons. After all, it was an effect of idleness, for you are in the prime of life, when invention and judgment go together.

Swift may have had in mind some satire understood between them; but it is more likely that his reference to a change of text, title, and names of persons meant a device to keep the story of *Polly* from bearing any earmarks of kinship to the suspected ballad opera of 1728. Gay's denial in his Preface of specific satire in *Polly* should settle the matter.

The following quotation from a contemporary newspaper gives an

interesting hint at the popular mind on this subject. *Fog's Weekly Journal* for April 26, 1729, published as its main editorial an unsigned article on *Polly,* too long to reproduce, but worth giving in part. This publication was a Tory organ, which would naturally support Gay and take any opportunity of featuring the general satire of his piece and belittling the suspected volleys against the Whig administration. The spirit of the whole article is semi-humorous in tone.

> The second part of the Beggar's Opera, so much talk'd of, is at length come out, and I believe we may say, *Latet Anguis in Herba,* there is a Snake in the Grass: The Author had indeed endeavor'd to protect himself by a very thick Disguise; his Armor is like the Shield of Ajax, at least seven fold; and tho' no doubt, there is a great deal of secret scandal couch'd under very common Reflections, yet we may say of them, as of a Sibyl's Book, or a modern Prophecy, you may pore out your Eyes before you can inform your understanding; what I mean is, the scandal lies so deep it is hard to come at it: But what then? Men of Sagacity and deep Heads, like Skilful Divers, would fetch it, tho' it lay at the bottom of the sea, or climb to it, tho' it hung upon the horns of the Moon.
>
> As for my part, I declare I have no Quarrel to the Author of this Piece; yet I can't help observing, that I can discover as strong a satire against future ages, as against the present; those Passages that are obscure and intricate, I shall take no Notice of, because I don't pretend to the art of decyphering, a Science of great use; but those reflections that have no gilding, where the poison can be discover'd by the naked eye, I think deserve our Reproof.

Then follows a discussion of certain unimportant passages in the play, which are gravely examined for satire and exposed for their particular application. The author concludes:

> I shall have done with him for this time, tho I have not gone thro half the work; for I think I have said enough to shew the dangerous tendency of such writings, and the Effect they have upon weak Minds.
>
> Perhaps the Author may sneer at me for my ill-natured Commentary as he probably may stile it, but Truth is Truth, let him be as angry as he will; for I have said before, and I declare it again, that what I have done, is not out of any personal Spleen to him; I have preserv'd a Temper which can give no Gentleman offence; I have made no personal Reflections upon him for differing with me in his Notions of Politicks, and so I take my leave.

As a dramatic work, *Polly* is not entitled to great consideration, being but a pale shadow of Gay's masterpiece. It is as the second part of *The Beggar's Opera,* the brilliant and vivacious original, that

it compels examination. The very title harks back to the other play, at a time when the name of the heroine was on every tongue and even the actresses who performed the rôle were being called by the name of Gay's creation instead of their own. The idea of transporting some of the characters to America was novel enough, and just plausible enough, in line with the former situations, to strike the fancy of many followers of the fortunes of Polly and Macheath. The fact that *The Beggar's Opera* had ended so abruptly might indeed recommend a sequel to introduce the further adventures of certain members of the popular *dramatis personae* and really bring the story to a definite conclusion.

The sequel itself, however, is so stupid, so lacking in motivation, so out of character with the realism of *The Beggar's Opera,* that we feel like calling it, not a second part of that human, though frivolous, old comedy, but a veritable anticlimax in the field of empty romance or melodrama. Gay was clearly out of his sphere when he tried his hand at a grotesque heroic, operatic satire with a foreign setting, full of pirates and Indians. If he intended burlesque, it is dull and colorless, without that cleverness of plot and dialogue which keeps mock-tragedy from becoming serious enough to spoil itself. If he intended social invective, in the manner of Swift, it is a failure. The spirit of the play is not happy, but actually unpleasant, and almost as bad as that of *The Beggar's Opera* is good. The treatment is looser and coarser, and the piece is likely to leave a purely negative impression on any audience of one that has the patience to wade through it. The first two acts are superior to the last, but at best the whole of *Polly* is flat reading.

The author of *The Companion to the Playhouse,* speaking of *Polly* in 1764, not many years after the piece was printed, sums up the difference between the two productions of Gay:

> The Opera before us is so totally innocent of either Satire, Wit, Plot, or Execution, that had not Mr. Gay declared by publishing it as his, it would, I think, have been difficult to have persuaded the world that their favorite Polly, could have so greatly degenerated from those charms, which first brought them into Love with her, or that the Author of the Beggar's Opera was capable of so poor a Performance as the Piece before us.

From this point of view, Gay is to be congratulated on the veto of his theatrical representation. *Polly* might have been a failure on the

stage, unless it could have been floated into favor (an unlikely supposition) by the reputation of *The Beggar's Opera.*

The saving grace of *Polly,* in the midst of miscellaneous trash, is the liberal supply of songs. They are rarely equal, and never superior, to those of the other opera, but some of them are not greatly inferior. The airs are not quite so familiar, and are not so often traditional ballad tunes, but actual performance might have brought them dramatic popularity in 1729, just as it has during the present season. Thackeray praises these lyrics very highly, saying that though the play is a wearisome continuation "the verses are to the full as pretty as in the first piece."[14] But as we lay down the book of *Polly,* perhaps a copy which was sold to a "gay subscriber" in the stormy days of 1729, we are likely to agree with the author in the first speech of his Introduction, "A sequel to a Play is like more last words. 'Tis a kind of absurdity."

Polly finally got a theatrical hearing, being acted for the first time on June 19, 1777, at the Haymarket. Forty-eight years after the Lord Chamberlain prevented Gay's sequel from coming on the stage, George Colman ventured to produce the opera with certain alterations. The *New Theatrical Dictionary,* published in 1792, says that

> it completely justified all the censures which had been passed upon it, being as insipid and uninteresting a performance as ever appeared on the English stage. After a few nights representation it sunk into its former obscurity.

Closer to the event is the criticism of "A Comic opera intitled Polly," from the *Whitehall Evening Post,* Saturday, June 21, 1777, two days after the initial performance. The second paragraph deserves full quotation:

> Considered in a dramatic light, our impartiality compels us to pronounce it a very contemptible production indeed. Not one laughable incident or situation arising in the whole three acts; and as to Plot, or Fable, it is so totally destitute of either, that we are at a loss to account for Gay's ever attempting to build upon so scanty a foundation. —— The Piece being in itself so extraordinary a jumble, it is no discredit to the Performers to say, they were confused and bewildered in the representation of it,—and yet did all possible justice to their several Characters.

The writer, who sees little to admire, adds toward the end of his article, "Upon the whole, however, the Piece was favorably received,

[14] *English Humorists* (Fourth Lecture).

and at the fall of the curtain given out for Friday." Oulton's comment is somewhat similar to that of the newspaper:[15]

> The Opera was very well performed (though some of the performers were imperfect the first night) and met with applause. The satire, however, of this piece, being of a temporary nature lost a great deal of its effect, and of course the Opera was no *standing dish.*

Gay, who would eagerly have seen the début of *Polly,* was fortunately spared the embarrassment. He had a substitute, however, who must have relished, with secret satisfaction, the opera she had so vigorously defended and promoted in 1729, and on account of which she had become an outcast from the court; the Duchess of Queensberry, though quite old, attended the first performance and after that saw the play more than once during the short period before her death in the following July. The piece was acted a few times in later years, at the Haymarket, at Drury Lane, and at Bath, but did not achieve distinction.

Now, after many announcements and much expectation, *Polly* has been brought to life in entirely new surroundings, even while *The Beggar's Opera,* of which it was meant to be the sequel, not the competitor, still endures and fast approaches the third anniversary. It was revived on December 30, 1922, at the Kingsway Theatre, London, under a management allied with that of the Lyric, and it promises to hold the stage for some time, though not to rival the production to which it is so closely akin. Its apparently immediate success (popular, if not critical) is due, beyond question, to at least three things, aside from the novelty itself: the present gigantic interest in Gay's other piece and in English light opera as a type; the new version of the music, similar to that in *The Beggar's Opera,* and artistically arranged by Mr. Austin; and the work of Mr. Clifford Bax, who has adapted quite boldly the book of the play for current use. *Polly* badly needed revision, no doubt, but in this case, according to one critic of the transformation, Gay has been thrown overboard. At any rate, even if, as the *Times* remarked, the performance is free from the charm that belongs to *The Beggar's Opera,* two genuine artists, Lilian Davies, as Polly, and Pitt Chatham, as Macheath, mirror pleasantly the original characters appearing simultaneously at Hammersmith.

[15] *Hist. of Theatres,* I, 65.

CHAPTER XXI

THE MORALITY QUESTION

NO discussion of *The Beggar's Opera* would be complete without consideration of the morality question. It appeared early in the first season and was agitated at intervals during the whole of the eighteenth century and a part of the nineteenth. The concern over this matter experienced in some quarters, to balance the light-hearted reception of the play by the general public, is evident to anyone who scans the printed works of various periods to gain a continued commentary on the subject. The fact that no less a person than James Boswell projected, seriously, a book to treat the problem is a matter of record. This chapter seems to be the first attempt at a substitute for his abandoned plan.

The fear of evil tendencies in *The Beggar's Opera* has unusual interest because of its relation to the age of moralizing literature in which Gay's play was produced. The attacks of Jeremy Collier and the protests of others, long before 1728, had found effect, and gradually the tone of drama had improved since the overdose of indecency on the Restoration stage. A more sensible attitude was being taken by the writers for the English theatres and the sky was clearing in the east. Then something happened, purely by accident, to disturb the moral censorship of the surviving literary Puritans. Gay, out of the spirit of satire and burlesque, to heighten his scheme of wit and ridicule, brought forth in *The Beggar's Opera* a hero highwayman and a comic idealization of low life and character. What he had in no way intended as a revolt against the school of moralists represented by Collier and Law, or presented with an aim to damage virtue and encourage vice, was by many taken seriously as the attitude of the author and pounced upon as unfit for the patronage of the Christian world. The easy-going poet had thrown a bomb into the camp of the enemy against whom war had not even been declared.

The most notable public rebuke of *The Beggar's Opera* came in the form of a sermon delivered in March, 1728, by the Rev. Thomas

Herring, a court chaplain and preacher at Lincoln's Inn Chapel, who later rose to the positions of Archbishop of York and of Canterbury. This denunciation of Gay's opera may have been made on political grounds, as an echo of the resentment of Walpole which had possibly passed around the whole official circle and reached this appointed churchman, zealous for promotion, and the antagonism on the basis of immorality may have served as a cloak for a reply to the opposition party. Since it was made from the pulpit, however, it should be considered as a part of the voice raised against the criminal influence of *The Beggar's Opera.*

Mist's Weekly Journal, March 30, 1728, in a brief paragraph also telling of the success of the play in Ireland, contains what is perhaps the first published observation of the Herring attack: "A noted Preacher near Lincoln's Inn Play-House has taken Notice of the Beggar's Opera, in the pulpit, and inveighed against it, as a Thing of every evil Tendency." Gay wrote to Swift, from Bath, on May 16, 1728: "I suppose you must have heard, that I had the Honour to have had a sermon preached against my works by a Court Chaplain, which I look upon as no small Addition to my Fame." Over a month before, on April 3, Elijah Fenton had written to Broome, "You have heard of Johnny Gay's success with his mock opera, which had been both applauded and preached against."

The sermon of Dr. Herring seems not to have been printed, but there is a description of it in the preface to "Seven Sermons on Public Occasions. By the Most Reverend Dr. Thomas Herring, Late Lord Archbishop of Canterbury," published in London by William Duncombe, a friend, in 1763. The editor says:

> Once indeed a great Clamour was raised on account of his alluding to a popular Entertainment, then exhibited at the neighboring Theatre, and presuming to condemn it, as of pernicious Consequence in regard to the Practice of Morality and Christian Virtue. He was not singular in this Opinion; and Experience afterwards confirmed the Truth of his Observations, since several Thieves and Street-robbers confessed in *Newgate,* that they raised their Courage at the Playhouse, by the Songs of their Hero *Macheath,* before they sallied forth on their desperate nocturnal Exploits.

In the correspondence of Edward Pyle with the Rev. Dr. Samuel Kerrick, at Dersingham, we find this passage, dated March 9, 1747:[1]

[1] Letter XXVI.

Pray, have you seen his Grace of York's fast-sermon? It is a fine one, and has recovered him the credit he lost by his sermon at York last year. N. B.—To page 15 it is the very sermon he preached against the "Beggar's Opera."

The sixth of Dr. Herring's "Seven Sermons" is "A Sermon Preached at Kensington, on Wednesday the 7th of January, 1748,[2] Being The Day appointed by Proclamation for a General Fast." The first fifteen pages, dealing with such matters as the general loss of public virtue, in which are seen England's approaching ruin, immorality, and intemperance, and the daily robberies which "interrupt the Repose of the City and the Country," might well be those referred to by Edward Pyle. This is probably as close as we can come to the famous sermon of Lincoln's Inn.

It might be expected that the man to come to Gay's defense was Jonathan Swift, himself a clergyman of the Church of England. Though naturally biased in favor of his friend, he could, by reason of his own position in the ecclesiastical scale, discuss aptly, however sincerely, the question of the morality of *The Beggar's Opera.* The reply was published in the third number of the *Intelligencer,* 1728, in an article already quoted from for its comment on Italian opera and political satire. A note to a letter from Dr. Herring to William Duncombe,[3] published in 1777, speaks of Swift's party prejudice and private connections in his defense of Gay's work, asking, "What shall we say, what can we think, of a clergyman, who could condemn his brother for preaching against the Beggar's Opera . . .?"

The following passages are quoted from Swift's dissertation as reprinted in *Mist's Weekly Journal,* July 6, 1728:

But I have now done with this author as a Politician, and shall consider him henceforth only as Author of the Beggar's Opera, wherein he hath by a turn of Humour, entirely new, placed Vice of all Kinds in the strongest and most odious light; and thereby done eminent service both to Religion and Morality. This appears from the unparalled Success he hath met with.

I am assured that several worthy Clergymen in this City, went privately to see the Beggar's Opera represented; and that the fleering coxcombs in the Pit amused themselves with making discoveries, and spreding the names of those gentlemen round the audience.

I shall not pretend to vindicate a clergyman who would appear openly in his Habit at a Theatre, among such a vicious crew as would probably stand round

[2] Mistake for 1747.

[3] Apparently by John Duncombe, his son, editor of the correspondence.

him, and at such lewd Comedies and prophane Tragedies as are often represented. Besides I know very well, that Persons of their function are bound to avoid the Appearance of Evil, or of giving Cause of Offence. But when the Lord Chancellors, who are Keepers of the King's Conscience, when the Judges of the Land, whose Title is Reverend, when ladies, who are bound by the Rules of their Sex, to the strictest decency, appear in the Theatre without Censure, I cannot understand, why a young clergyman who goes concealed out of Curiosity to see an innocent and moral Play, should be so highly condemned; nor do I much approve the Rigour of a great P——te,[4] who said *he hoped none of his Clergy were there.* I am glad to hear there are no weightier objections to that Reverend body, planted in this city,[5] and I wish there never may. But I should be very sorry that any of them should be so weak, as to imitate a Court Chaplain in England, who preached against the Beggar's Opera, which will probably do more good than a thousand bad sermons.

In this happy performance, all the Characters are just, and none of them carried beyond Nature, or hardly beyond Practice. It discovers the whole System of that Common-Wealth, or that Imperium in Imperio of Iniquity established among us, by which neither our lives, nor our Properties, are secure, either in the High-ways, or in publick assemblies, or even in our own Houses. It shews the miserable lives, and the constant fate of those abandoned Wretches; for how little they sell their Lives and Souls; betrayed by their Whores; their Comrades; and the Receivers and Purchasers of these Thefts and Robberies.

Upon the whole, I deliver my judgment, That nothing but servile Attachment to a Party, affectation of singular, lamentable Dullness, mistaken Zeal, or studied Hypocrisy, can have the least objection against this excellent moral performance.

We should not form the idea that it was a mere minority that dared to speak against *The Beggar's Opera* in 1728.[6] While the rank and file were swayed by the charms of Polly, a fair-sized opposition was soon developed in the first season. Besides the attack of Herring and the defense of Swift, a host of minor voices sought the public ear. The following paragraphs include the most important contemporary evidence (1728-40) of the stir caused by Gay's comedy, with its alleged unethical influence. Since the opinions gleaned from early pamphlets and periodical writings are usually inaccessible, fairly extensive quotation has frequently been made.

On March 2, 1728, the day of the twenty-ninth performance, *Mist's Weekly Journal* contained this item:

[4] Prelate.

[5] Dublin.

[6] The view of Chrysander (*G. F. Handel*).

Certain People, of an envious disposition, attribute the Frequency of the late Robberies to the success of the Beggar's Opera, and the Pleasure the Town takes in the Character and Impurity of Captain Mackheath; but others, less concerned in that Affair, and more for the Publick, account for them by the general poverty and corruption of the Time, and the Prevalency of some *powerful* Examples.

On March 30, 1728, the day of the thirty-ninth performance, was printed a long letter "To the Author of the London Journal," championing the cause of virtue in a tirade against *The Beggar's Opera:*

Sir, It has, I think, been generally agreed among Moralists, that all publick Sports and Entertainments should be so regulated, as to have a Tendency to the Encouragement of Virtue, and the discountenancing of Vice and Immorality. This Practice, established by the wisest Legislators, who were sensible how great an Influence Plays and other Diversions have on the Minds and Manners of the Populace, has been conformable to that salutary Maxim. How shocking then, wou'd it have appeared to the venerable Sages of Antiquity, to have seen an Author bring upon the Stage, as a proper Subject of Laughter and Merriment, a Gang of Highwaymen and Pick-pockets, triumphing in their successful Villainies, and braving the ignominious Death they so justly deserve, with the undaunted Resolution of a Stoical Philosopher? . . . The chief End of Punishment is to prevent the Comission of the like Offences for the future; and therefore all good Subjects should endeavour, as far as it lies in their Power, to heighten the Terror of the Penalties annexed by the Laws to flagrant Crimes: But to place (on the contrary) these Penalties in a ludicrous Light, and to represent them as easie to be borne and contemptible, is an effect blunting the Edge of the *Civil* Sword, and opening the Flood-Gates (if I may so speak,) of the most outragious Enormities. The Mischief will be still farther promoted, if the Lives of such abandon'd Wretches as Robbers and Night-Walkers are described as agreeable, and full of Mirth and Jollity. How far a celebrated Entertainment may have contributed (contrary to the Intention of the Author) towards these daring Attacks which are daily committed on the Property of the Subject in the Streets of our Capital, (in Defiance of all Law, and, I believe, beyond the Example of former *Ages*), I will not pretend to say. But, I am sure, nothing can be more proper to foment these Violences than such Lines as these:

"See the Ball I hold!
Let the Chymists toil like Asses,
Our Fire their Fire surpasses,
And turns all our Lead to Gold."

The Agreeableness of the Entertainment, and its being Adapted to the Taste of the Vulgar, and set to easy pleasant Tunes, (which almost everybody can remember,) makes the Contagion spread the wider, and the Consequence the more to be dreaded. . . .

The letter, which is signed "Philopropos," has a postscript directly concerning the Herring case:

Since the Writing of the foregoing Letter, a Sermon has been preach'd in the Chappel of one of our Inns of Court, on the same Subject, by a celebrated Divine, which, I doubt not, will make a great Noise. It is to be hoped, he will suffer it to be printed, out of regard for his own Reputation, as well as for the Service of the Publick. The judicious Critick was there display'd, as well as the Christian Orator. However this Discourse may be ridiculed by the fluttering *Beaux* and *Belles* of the Town, I will be so bold to say, that (as long as our Morals are sunk,) the clear Reasoning, good Sense and manly Rhetorick in it, will command the Approbation of all Persons of Virtue and Sobriety, who have so much Thought and Consideration, as to attend to the Consequences of Things. —— It has been objected, that the Subject was beneath the Preacher's Notice: To which it may be reply'd, in the words of *Horace;*

Haec Nugae seria ducent,
In mala;

and nothing, which has a direct Tendency to promote a general Depravity of Manners, can be thought unworthy the Rebuke of a Christian Divine.

The *London Journal,* nearly a month later, on April 20, 1728, published another letter, signed "Benovolus," but possibly by the same hand, continuing the assault on *The Beggar's Opera* and defending those who have already dared to speak against it. One paragraph contains the important points regarding Gay's piece:

These Gentlemen [modern writers] trace out new Paths of Fame, unknown to their pious Predecessors who flourish'd in the Reign of *Charles* the Second. Marriage indeed was then ridiculed, and the Clergy placed in a contemptible Light: But to chuse a Highwayman for the Hero of the *Drama,* and to raise, not Indignation or Compassion, but Mirth and Laughter, by representing him on the Stage intoxicating himself with strong Liquors in order to *die hard,* as the Felons phrase it: This is a new Improvement, reserv'd to crown with Bays a living Bard! It were to be wish'd, for the Honour of the *British* Taste, that we cou'd conceal from our polite Neighbours abroad,[7] the Success this Piece has met with. But (since That is impossible,) let it be known at the same Time, there are some among us, who (though they allow its Claim to low Humour,) have so much Courage and Honesty, as to protest against the Plan or Groundwork of it as absurd, and of dangerous Consequence. If it be granted that *Dramatick* Performances have any Influence at all on the Minds of the People, (which, I believe was never yet doubted,) it will follow that an Entertainment of this Kind, where almost all the Characters are vicious and criminal, and yet, by the Poignancy of Raillery and Satyr joined to the Charms of Musick, pleas-

[7] See *post,* pp. 243-244.

ing and delightful; and where the vilest Principles are propagated in the most alluring manner; I say, such an Entertainment must highly tend to corrupt and debauch the Morals of the Nation.

On May 14, 1728, appeared the very interesting, though fictitious, "Memoirs Concerning the Life and Manners of Captain Mackheath."[8] Aside from its connection with the popularity of the play as acted during the first season, it has a bearing on the contemporary morality agitation. To some extent it seems a sort of burlesque on the sermons preached about *The Beggar's Opera,* and other sentiment against it, or at least a satire on the same things Gay himself was satirizing in his comedy of low life, including the current corruption that had made the point of the play possible. It can hardly be taken as a personal attack on Gay, although he receives his share of attention.

After declaring his idea of the duties of a true biographer, the writer says:

What principally determined me to publish these *Memoirs,* was, an honest Inclination I had to undeceive my Fellow-Citizens, before whom he has been lately set upon the public Stage as a Character of Heroism, if not of Virtue. The Dramatick Writer has indeed dress'd him out to Advantage, he stands erect the first Piece in the Canvas, and has gained much popular Applause; he has made him the Lover and the Warrior, he is the Darling of the Fair, and the Glory of the thievish Heroes who surround him: He is a perfect, polite, modern fine Gentleman, and *Dorimant* in Sir *Fopling;* though a Person of equal Morals, is not a more accomplish'd Rake. He commits his Robberies with an Air of Authority and Gallantry, the common People mistake his Vices for Virtues; and those who are not in his Gang, applaud him.

It is the Purpose of this little Treatise . . . to check this popular Applause so injurious to the Public; nor am I the first who have taken the Alarm: our Reverend Guides and Spiritual Directors *have cry'd aloud and spar'd not;* they likewise have publish'd the Dangers which visibly threaten our Morals, when the People are used to behold a notorious Robber set up thus in a Point of Light, where all the Horrors of his Trade, where the dark Lanthorn, the Pistol, the Dagger, and the Ruin and Spoil of the Poor are concealed; he appears upon the Stage, not only surrounded with Pleasures and Glory, but even with Power, at the Head of a well arm'd and a vicious Crew, and is at last repriev'd by the Poet, even from the imaginary Punishment. When therefore a Person really Infamous, and an Instrument of much Evil to his Country, shall receive so much Encouragement and Applause from the People, and from those who are accounted of the better Sort too; for many such are to be found among his

[8] See *ante,* p. 19.

Admirers. It is worthy our Labour to look back a little, and to enquire into the Reason of the present Degeneracy of our Morals: Let us see then how, and by what Degrees, a brave, a great, and a generous People became so corrupt, to be capable to look on and laugh at Fraud and Rapine, and to mistake a Highwayman for a Heroe.

After discussing the political and social conditions that preceded and influenced the career of Macheath, the author continues:

As I am now to draw the Character of the Captain, and to give my Reader a View of his Person, before I publish his Actions; I beg leave to observe, that this Gentleman has been extremely misrepresented by the Author of the *Beggars Opera;* he has indeed taken, I think, too great a Poetical License: for since he descended to draw a living Highway-man, a Highway-man of the present Age, for such he is; however the Vulgar, by the Poet's imperfect Draught of him, may mistake him, he ought to have confin'd himself a little more strictly to Truth. Very few of the Captain's Irregularities with the Fair Sex have ever come to my Knowledge: or if he has had any criminal Amours, I never heard him charg'd with Perfidy to a Woman; and *Betty Flareit,* with whom the Captain has sometimes deign'd to amuse himself . . . has often declar'd he was a very innocent Lover. Neither would the Captain's Constitution at all bear any sort of Debauch in Brandy, or strong Spirits: So that here again the Dramatist has wrong'd him, to make way for a drunken Sonnet or two at his going off.

Then he proceeds to tell "what Figure the Captain will make as he really is, without the Flourishes of the Poetical Pen." Here follows an account of the events in the life of the fictitious highwayman, amusing in its mock-seriousness and its scholarly exactness of details. In conclusion the author points out to his readers "by this Example, that the direct Paths to Happiness are Integrity and Content." He knows "it is a very difficult, a very invidious, and a dangerous Task, to write the Actions of evil Men while they yet live," but he has resolved to do his "Duty as a good Citizen." Finally, he exhorts Macheath

not to go on still to behold himself in a false and a flattering Mirrour, and to glorify himself in the Glare of those Rays which his Prosperity only hath thrown around him; the Desolation and Ravages he daily commits are recorded and laid up against him, and Punishment surely, though slowly, stalks behind him . . . he must expect therefore when the evil Hour shall come, to see himself totally abandon'd. . . . I have rung out the Alarm-Bell, and warn'd him while the Day yet is, to repent of his evil Ways.

If the foregoing pamphlet is plainly the idle invention of an occasional scribbler from Grub Street, with no serious purpose, the fol-

lowing well-written narrative tract, dealing with the influence of *The Beggar's Opera,* may possibly contain allegorical fiction with a didactic aim. Even though the treatise should be found to be burlesque of current stories of bad example and criminal confession, the fact remains that Gay's comedy could furnish material for such a *homily* just at this time. *Thievery A-la-Mode: or the Fatal Encouragement,* published in June, 1728,[9] tells of three children, a son and two daughters, who were left, at the death of their father, in poverty. It describes their want and temptations, as well as their concern for the future.

While he [the son] was taken up with these distracting Meditations, a young Gentleman of his Acquaintance, who was also his Friend as far as a Bottle of Wine, or a Supper, would needs have him go with him to a whimsical Entertainment at the Play-House, very much in vogue, call'd the Beggar's Opera. The House was so extremely full, that tho' they went at 4 o'clock, they could get no Seat, but were obliged to stand at the Pit-door. Millefont, whose Soul at present was little tun'd for such Diversions, would fain have persuaded his Friend to go out; but the other cry'd out on his ill Taste; swore that no Fatigue was too great for the Pleasure they should receive when the Actors should begin; adding, that he had been a Spectator of the same Entertainment for 2 and 30 nights, yet still came to it with more than the Raptures of a first Enjoyment of a Mistress. Their Conversation happening to be pretty loud, several Gentlemen that sat near, join'd with him in opinion, saying, nothing was ever so agreeable; one protesting that he had seen it 5 and 30 times, another 40; and a third, that he had not miss'd once the Representation of it, nor would, if it lasted a whole season, which he heartily wished it might. Such prodigious Encomiums, given by Persons who seemed to be of distinction, and had good Sense, made Millefont more patiently endure the little Ease of his Situation; but strangely was he amaz'd, when the opening Scenes presented only Characters, which to him seem'd too low to afford any Pleasure to an elegant Taste. He understood the thing, as certainly it was intended by the Author, a Satyr on the Inconsistencies and unnatural Conduct of the Italian Operas. . . . But he found few who thought as he did; they did not seem to take the Meaning of the Poet; they admir'd it for the Whim, and because it made them laugh, but had not at all the worse Opinion of those Performances it was designed to ridicule. And this Observation threw him into very serious Reflections on the capricious Disposition of the Age.

Some few days after, passing by a great Picture-shop, he saw the Prints of Captain Macheath and Polly Peachum hanging in the Windows with those of the first Quality of both Sexes in the Kingdom. And the same Evening, happening to be at a Place where several Ladies were visiting, he observed that

[9] June 8, according to the *Craftsman* for that date.

every one of them had the agreeable Highway-man and his two Doxies painted on their Fans and Snuff-boxes. What, said he to himself, is it become an emulative piece of Gentility to encourage the vilest Characters that Nature will bear? How many worthy Parts has Mr. Walker appear'd in on the stage? How many great Heroes have seemed to live again in the Representation of Mr. Booth and Mr. Wilks? But the Applause they receiv'd for them was almost as short-liv'd as the Performance! The Morals of the Patriot, and the graceful Gesture, and fine Utterance of the Actor, were alike remember'd! In various Scenes Mr. Walker has appeared in the most advantageous Colours, and tho' he merited, never could arrive at the Honours he now enjoys.—Is it then to the most low, vicious, and depraved Character he owes his Fame?—Most certainly! else he had not so long been neglected.—Degenerate Age! When only Crimes, and those too of a nature which none but the meanest and most wretched part of Creation can submit to be guilty of, shall be immortalized in Paint and Verse.

Thus did he reason with himself; and coming out of his Soliloquy, could not forbear expressing aloud some part of his Sentiments; but he was presently silenced, over-born by a torrent of Praises almost as absurd as the Theme they were upon. The general voice was against him, and he durst not insist on the Subject, for fear of being accounted a Person entirely devoted to his own Opinion.

In fine, he could go into no Company, hear no Discourse, but what was taken up with the charming Characters of Captain Macheath and Polly Peachum. Surprize, they say, wears off, and the most prodigious Events, when become frequent, cease to excite wonder; yet could not his diminish at so astonishing a Proof of the Stupidity, to give it no worse a Name, of the Town. Good God! cry'd he, as often as any Testimonies of this nature reach'd his Ears, of what use are now the great Examples drawn from the Heroes of Antiquity, or the more lively instances of the present Worthies? The god-like Virtues of Tamerlane no more excite Applause! Bellisarius mourns in vain, and the Lover of his Country, Cato, is forgot! The Conquests of our fifth Henry! the Piety of the Sixth! and Valour of the fam'd Black Prince! are Subjects too dull for the modish Conversation of these times. The Cant of Newgate, and that sort of behavior which some Malefactors are guilty of, even when under Condemnation, and was accustomed to be so shocking to a thinking Soul, when any account happen'd to be given of it by the Ordinary, is now a matter of Mirth, and charms the British genius more than Shakspear, or than Otway ever could.

Driven to despair, Millefont at last reluctantly decides to become a highwayman, the small regard for virtue and the encouragement of vice in the play having accomplished their purpose: "In this despairing Humour, he provided himself of a good Horse and Pistols, and set up for Captain Macheath's Profession," in which he was eminently successful.

Many various Adventures he met with in his new Profession . . . but they being only such as may ordinarily happen to Persons who travel on the account he did, I shall pass them over in silence, lest my Reader should imagine I design to imitate What I have condemn'd, and would entertain him with the Tricks and Dialect of a common Thief . . .

One day he robs a man familiar to him:

he now remembered this was one of those Gentlemen he had seen at the Play-House, and heard burst out into such extravagant Encomiums on the *Beggar's Opera*. It came presently into his head to retort upon him in a merry way; which he did in these words. This, Sir, said he, is but the Sequel of the Beggar's Opera; and I hope no gentleman will be offended at the *Reality*, who was delighted with the Representation. 'Tis, methinks, a charitable Consideration of the Town, that since the South-Sea Bubbles, and other publick Calamities have made so many Beggars, this way of being supply'd by the Pockets of the more fortunate should be encouraged. To take a Purse by Violence or Stratagem from those not inclined to bestow it, was, indeed, in former unfashionable Times, thought scandalous; and not all the Bravery, nor Generosity of *Hind*, ——,[10] or the Golden Farmer, could gain them any better Titles than Rogue, and Thief. But now, thanks to the Beggar's Opera, 'tis become an agreeable and a laudable Employment, engaging to young Men and charming to the Women; and a young Fellow need not doubt but by it to raise his Fortune from the one, and his Pleasures from the other.

These satirical Reflections, 'tis probable, vex'd the Gentleman no less than the loss of his Money, but he immediately held out his Purse and Watch. But our accomplished Thief would by no means accept the latter, telling him, that since *Jonathan Wild* was unfortunately taken off, and none as yet had thought fit to assume the Character of Peachum, the Macheaths had no way to vend those sort of Commodities with safety, and therefore dealt all in Specie.

The hero is soon shot in an encounter on the road, and dying confesses to a clergyman of the Church of England "the crimes he had of late been guilty of, and the Incitements he had to encourage him to take up the Profession of a Robber, concluding with a hearty prayer, that he might be the only person seduced by the extravagant applause the Town gave the Character of a Thief in the Beggar's Opera." He makes "the most fervent Supplications, that Heaven would be pleased to restore the British genius to some degree of its former Vigour, and that no more unhappy Millefonts might be debauched from their first Principles by the Encouragement given to the depraved and vicious Characters which compose the Beggar's Opera."

[10] This blank is printed in the original version.

How far his Devotions will succeed, is yet uncertain; for the Town seems still to languish under the same Disease, and for any thing that can be gather'd from the Symptoms, will not soon be cured. We are apt indeed to flatter ourselves with some little hope from the following account; viz. That some Gentlemen, fam'd for a superiority of Wit, to prove themselves such, laid a considerable Wager, that whatever they undertook to espouse, should please the world *nemine contradicente,* as long as they should countenance it by their presence. The agreement was, that it should be something which had in it not the least shadow of intrinsic merit. The Beggar's Opera being at that time apropos on the stocks, that was pitched on for the decision, and accordingly was by the Wagerers cry'd up and extoll'd.

If this be fact, these Gentlemen have certainly the double Pleasure of Winning the Stake, and at the same time knowing themselves the Arbitrators and Judges of Wit, even in a Cause where their Censure must be against Wit. But I rather fear this is an Excuse which some ingenious Lovers of their Country have invented, to screen the reigning Folly of the Times, and make that pass for a Design, which is in reality a Depravity of Nature, and a Deficiency of that Spirit which formerly encouraged the Muses Growth, and the Promotion of Learning and of Virtue.

Defoe took a shot at *The Beggar's Opera* in his social tract entitled *Augusta Triumphans,* published in 1728. The author of *Robinson Crusoe,* always a professing moralist, though with an inconsistent record behind him, now three years before his death felt his sense of righteousness shocked by the depravity of Gay's performance:

We take pains to puff 'em [rogues] up in their villainy, and thieves are set out in so amiable a light in "The Beggar's Opera" that it has taught them to value themselves on their profession, rather than be asham'd of it by making a highwayman the hero and dismissing him at last unpunished.

The Stage Medley (1728?) contains the following verses, as well as a picture of the ghost of Collier:

If heretofore, the Manners of the Stage
Fill'd Zealous Collier with a Priestly rage;
What would he say, were he alive, to view
Punks made Heroines, and Footpads Heroes too?

In connection with the morality question as discussed in the following years, *Polly,* the sequel of 1728-29, of course figured along with *The Beggar's Opera.* It was rumored in some quarters that the prohibition was based on objection to certain improper scenes and situations. In the Preface to the printed play Gay himself enters into the discussion and refers to such an accusation, saying, "I have

been inform'd, too, that in the following Play, I have been charg'd with writing immoralities," and defending his position as an author on the side of virtue. The cause for the ban, however, as has already been explained, was political resentment; consequently we need not very seriously consider the reports about the dreaded immorality of *Polly*. In view of the fact that *Polly* obtains poetic justice by having Macheath executed for his crimes and giving the story an ending exactly opposite to that of the first part, with virtue triumphant both in the character of Polly and the general outcome of the plot, the sequel may indeed be called a dramatic reply (perhaps a humorous one) to Dr. Herring and his adherents. Oulton, writing in 1796, doubts the morality of *The Beggar's Opera* when he says of *Polly:*[11]

> This Opera was intended by the author, as the second part of the celebrated *Beggars Opera,* which being deemed a piece of evil tendency, the Lord Chamberlain prohibited the sequel, *wisely* imagining it must be *equally* dangerous; whereas in this opera, poetic justice is done to all the *worthy* characters in the preceding piece, who, in this are transported to the plantations, according to their *merit;* of course, in point of moral, the *Beggars Opera* is incompleat without the addition of *Polly;* and in all likelihood the author wrote this second part to atone for any mischief which the first might occasion; at any rate, it is sufficient to prove the writer's detestation of vice, and love of justice.

William Coxe, writing in the same year as Oulton,[12] finds that the scenes of *Polly,* "though not to be commended for their purity, are not so licentious as those in the Beggar's Opera."

Three other documents of 1729 claim our attention. The "Prelude to the Plays, or a few Serious Questions proposed to the Gentlemen, Ladies, and others, that frequent the Play-House," complains:

> Whence is it, that such Multitudes, Rich and Poor, Young and Old, flock to these Places of Diversion . . . Would you do so if a good Sermon was to be preached so often . . . But, O strange, such a silly Play as the Beggar's Opera should be acted 40 or 50 Times over, with Applause, in one Season! A godly Sermon is not so treated by many. O how vain is the Mind, and how captivated the Affections of Man by the Fall!

A vigorous protest against the immorality of Gay's piece is found in "A Satyrical Poem: or The Beggar's-Opera Dissected." Six large pages of verse are devoted to the idea of Gay's bad example in his

[11] *Hist. of Theatres,* I, 63.
[12] *Life,* prefixed to *Fables.*

portrayal of low life and the "scum of the Earth," of theft, and of fashionable vice. These passages are most to the point:

> He has fashion'd Vice, to every Taste,
> And made of Matrimony a Jest;
> Calls Murders, *Rapines* down right Peace,
> And juggles Vice, in Virtue's Place.
> Statesmen here, are mighty Robbers,
> Private Jugglers, and Stock-Jobbers.
>
> Or what if G—— will write, and pass for Wit,
> 'Tis he, and only he, must Answer it.
> Yet who can silent be, in Vertue's Cause,
> Where Vice triumphant, meets with such Applause.

Crime has been encouraged; the old are hardened, and the young are taught "to act those Vices"; and thus "The Infection spreads."

> To Vertu's Precepts they are Strangers grown,
> Now Vice Gigantic, struts it through the Town.
>
> 'Tis hard for th' unexperienc'd to Escape,
> Destruction dress'd in such a pleasing Shape.
> It guilds their Ruin, with a spacious Bait,
> And shews 'em not their Crime, till 'tis too Late.

A panacea is proposed in an appeal to those who do not want to see legitimate drama supplanted by the new ballad opera, and are willing to rally to its salvation. Another six-page poem of this year was *An Epistle from Matt of the Mint, Lately Deceased, to Captain Macheath.* It is a playful skit finding its motive in the attitude of many toward *The Beggar's Opera.* The motto on the title-page runs,

> The Justice Publick Robbers Here evade,
> Shall in Another World be doubly paid.

Matt is bewailing his league with Macheath in sin, and paints "the wretched Place" and the hotness of hell to warn his friend about his deeds and false sentiments and the evil effects of "Gambols, Wine and Women."

Bernard Mandeville, in the second part of *The Fable of the Bees,* 1730, speaks of people who thought he wrote "with an Intent to debauch the Nation, and promote all Manner of Vice." He says he could not understand them at first,

but since I have seen, that Men could be serious in apprehending the Encrease of Rogues and Robberies, from the frequent Representation of the Beggar's Opera, I am persuaded, that there really are such Wrongheads in the World, as will fancy Vices to be encouraged, when they see them expos'd.

John Loyd, in "A Satyr on the Times, and some of the Modern Plays," 1730, discusses four pieces, including *The Beggar's Opera.* He talks of writers

> Who prostitute the little Wit they own,
> To varnish Vice, and put all Virtue down.

The following lines are a significant summary of one side of contemporary opinion:

> The *Beggar's Opera,* so long our Boast,
> A World of Wickedness the Author cost:
> For unto Wit it never can lay claim,
> Since that is want of Sense, that's want of Shame.
> *Macheath,* the raving Hector of his Play,
> Too well informs us that the Poet's *Gay,*
> Whose Characters throughout are all so loose,
> That sure a Miss inspir'd him, not a Muse.
> How fond the Town to give such Trifles Praise,
> Which rightly censur'd, rather merit Birch, than Bays.

A View of the Town: or Memoirs of London, 1731, has a different word about the influence of Gay. Saying that the town has lost its taste, on account of Harlequins and Macheaths, the writer ventures the assertion that "if one were to judge of Folks Morals by the Pieces they applaud, one would be apt to think, both a modern Poet, and his Audience, had deserved the Gallows." Another statement is close to Dr. Herring's charge:

> Thieving and the Highway are Edged-Tools to play with, and they ought by no means to be set in a gay or ridiculous Light to the Mob. I believe, without aspersing the Authors of these *Tyburn Opera's,* I may place to their Account a Gang of Childish Robbers, lately executed.

The author of "The Taste of the Town: or, A Guide to all Publick Diversions," 1731, states bluntly, "I am sorry the *Beggar's Opera* has not either Religion, or Justice, to countenance its Run, and screen it from the Criticks."

In *The Friendly Writer, and Register of Truth* for December,

1732, Ruth Collins gives this affected, though apparently earnest, comment:

> The vain *Opera* of *Beggars* hath been again revived by the Men called Players, at the New Temple of Satan in *Covent-Garden;* whither Men and Women run every Night, in great Numbers, to behold a young Damsel, named *Norsa,* who singeth many idle Songs to delight the Ears of the Wicked.

In the midst of many antagonistic views concerning *The Beggar's Opera* comes this story of the wholesome effect of the play in the experience of Joseph Powis, executed for burglary on October 9, 1732.[13] On leaving his sweetheart "he was seized with the most melancholy thoughts, and to divert himself, went in the evening to see the Beggar's Opera; but when Captain Mackheath came fettered upon the stage, Powis was seized with trembling, and reflected that he might one day be a condemned man." After the play he refrained from any robbery for a whole week! At least one thief was not duped, by the theatrical shift of the hero's reprieve, into thinking that the misdeeds of a highwayman always escape punishment.

The performance, on March 11, 1735, of *Macheath in the Shades,*[14] itself a take-off, no doubt, on some phase of the morality question, furnished an opportunity for newspaper hack-writing. In the *Prompter,* March 25, 1735, appeared a letter from "Gay in the Shades," possibly written by the publisher, Aaron Hill, a boyhood friend of the dramatist, who could well be expected to satirize Gay's accusers.

> To the Author of the Serio-Comico-Farcical-Elysian-Entertainment of Mackheath in the Shades.
>
> Sir.
>
> The Applause and universally kind Reception my once darling Beggar's Opera Met with, from the Inhabitants of your Island, filled me with extraordinary Presumption, that my exit from your Regions of Light would be a sure Path to the Enjoyment of the unfading Pleasures allotted in those shady Realms for the just, the generous, the learned and wise: But how Groundless have I found my ill-judged Expectations?—No sooner had I discharged the Stygian Ferryman, than I was taken into Custody of two infernal Catchpolse, at the Suit of the Heliconian Synod, for high Crimes and Misdemeanors.
>
> I was conducted thro numberless ways, that never had felt the chearful Ray of Sun or Moon, till I arrived at the gates of the Elysian Fields.—Here my

[13] Recorded in *Newgate Calendar,* 1770.

[14] See *ante,* p. 52.

first attendants delivered me into the hands of two Genii, who led me into the Grand Council Chamber of the Poetick States, of which Homer sat as President, Virgil, Vice President; Aristotle, Attorney General; and Longinus, Sollicitor General.

The fatal Beggar's Opera was there produced. Meander, Terence, and Moliere were chief Witnesses against me; their Allegations of my infringing on the fundamental Maxim of all Poetry, the blending the Agreeable and Profitable together, and the subtle insinuating Virulence I had conveyed, that brought on a Depravation of Taste, Corruption of Manners, and Encouragement of Levity and Immorality, were so strongly asserted, and so undeniably proved that all I could say in my Defence was to no Purpose. —— In vain I offered, that my Performance was an original in its Kind; that the Songs were beautiful, easy, and well adapted to the Tunes—Here the Stagyrite, with an air equal to that of the Instructor of the Great Alexander, retorted, that my Plea was an Exaggeration of my Guilt; that the Characters represented in it ought to have been painted in a Light to give an Abhorrence of them, and not to afford Pleasure, or a mistaken pity for their just Punishment, or any Incitement to imitate them, from my false Varnish in behalf of their Crimes, which last might affect weak, or stir up and harden ill-disposed Minds in their Wickedness. Mr. Addison (who was always actuated with a good-natured Spirit) was pleased to mention my Pastorals and Fables as an Atonement for the fault in question; but the Court unanimously agreed they were not an adequate Compensation for the ills I had done,—which the Sollicitor General insisted were heightened by my Posthumous Indignity done to the President's hero;[15] but this Production appearing after my Departure from your Side of the Globe, I humbly begged the Court would not look upon it as mine; the musical Part, and other Inconsistencies, being the produce of some Terrestrial friends. —— This Apology, joined to What Mr. Addison had mentioned in my Favour, prevented the severe sentence of my total Exclusion from the blissful Mansions, and procured me the office of Assistant to Aristophanes, one of the Gate-Keepers to the grand Avenue that opens into the Elysian Fields, (to which Post he was adjudged for attempting to ridicule the Man whom the Delphick Oracle had declared the Wisest) with Permission to enter the Laurel Grove once a week, from which I am entirely debarred.

Thus, Sir, you see I am bereft of all those flattering Praises, that, Syren-like, deceived me in Your Orb: Here is no Radiant Dutchess, or Garter'd Duke, to support my Cause with a favorite smile or engaging Plaudit; whilst I am only allowed the bare Liberty of some ever-verdant Walks border'd with Ivy, and, as a great Indulgence, have Leave to encircle my Temples with a Coronet form'd from some over-short Leaves.

After a paragraph apparently alluding to the posthumous *Achilles*, the writer concludes with this information:

[15] Gay's *Achilles*, 1733.

Some Days since, one of our Couriers from your World, brought with him your new Medley of Mackheath in the Shades:—It was no sooner laid before the Pierian Council, but a Messenger was dispatched for me —— The Court strenuously urged, that this new Excrescence was a pernicious Germ of the Unnatural Root I had first planted. However, I had the good fortune, by a slight Comparison of our two Pieces, to satisfy the Court, that the latter was a spurious degenerate Issue, a Hydra-Offspring of the Author's own Brain: By this Means I was honourably acquitted, but can tell you, a Punishment is preparing for you against your Descent hither, which, by Repentance, you may yet prevent.

I am, Yours,
John Gay.

From the Lodge at the
Great Gate of the Elysian Seats,
the 17th Day of the Twelfth Mo.

An incidental impeachment of Gay's method of authorship, perhaps with little gravity behind it, occurs in "The Country Bard; or The Modern Courtiers," a poem of 1739.[16] Explaining a line of verse about Macheath's promise of marriage to Lucy, the author says in a footnote:

But *Macheath* made this Promise to procure his Escape: Tho it was *Johnny Gay's* Fault; he might have made a Wedding, and his Hero a Man of Honour, and a *President* worthy of future Imitation.

The disappointed Cibber, writing his life in 1739, alludes to *The Beggar's Opera* as a work which sets "Greatness, and Authority, in a contemptible, and the most vulgar Vice, and Wickedness, in an amiable Light." He adds, however, that Gay was "an honest good-natur'd Man, and who, when he had descended to write more like one, in the Cause of Virtue, had been as unfortunate, as others of that Class."[17]

An interesting side issue of the English morality excitement is the case, in 1750, of the French objection to Gay's comedy as originally written.[18] A contemporary account[19] says that "the *French,* whose different taste for stage-entertainments will not allow them to relish

[16] Printed in London.
[17] *Apology,* Chapter VII.
[18] See *ante,* p. 65.
[19] "An Impartial Statement of the Case of the *French* Comedians," etc., London, 1750.

a piece of which highwaymen, thief-catchers, bawds and whores, compose the whole drama, refused to license the acting of it." Ryan says of this same incident:[20]

> The French managers agreed to have it represented, provided the translator would alter the catastrophe, and, according to his deserts, let the hero be hanged. Hallam, however, would not suffer the work of an admired English poet to undergo any change but that of the mere translation, and accordingly brought it back, with the indignation of patriotic pride.

All the contemporary opinion against *The Beggar's Opera* did not damage its reputation with the masses, who saw it year after year in the theatres as almost their favorite attraction; or, for that matter, with certain members of the royal family, who paid no attention either to the possible political offense or to the warnings of the official divines. The play was not stopped by the censor, and its business was benefited, not ruined, by unfavorable discussion. It also survived later morality agitations, which perhaps were merely traditional descendants of the original commotion in and soon after 1728.

The most notable case of later opposition to *The Beggar's Opera* was the attempted prohibition, on the grounds of criminal influence, in 1773. We learn from various sources of the activities of the magistrates against the play. The *Gentleman's Magazine*, September, 1773, in the Historical Chronicle, under the fifteenth of the month, says:

> This day Sir John Fielding informed the Bench of Justices, that he had last year written to Mr. Garrick concerning the impropriety of performing the Beggar's Opera, which never was represented on the stage without creating an additional number of real thieves; he begged therefore the gentlemen present would join with him in requesting Mr. Garrick to desist from performing that Opera on Saturday evening.[21] The Bench immediately consented to the proposal; and a polite card was dispatched to Mr. Garrick for that purpose. To which Mr. Garrick returned for answer, that his company was so imperfect and divided, (many of the performers being yet in the country,) that it would be exceedingly inconvenient, if not impossible, for him to open with any other piece than that he had already advertised; but added, that he would in future do every thing in his power to oblige them.
>
> It must be confessed, that although the Beggar's Opera abounds with wit, humour, and the most poignant satire, it is notwithstanding very ill calculated to mend the morals of the common people, who are pleased to find all ranks and degrees, the highest and most respectable characters, brought down to a

[20] *Table Talk*, Vol. III.

[21] Sept. 18, the first night at D.L.

level with themselves. The Beggar's Opera is, in truth, the Thief's Creed and Common Prayer book, in which he fortifies himself in the most atrocious Wickedness, from the impunity and triumph of his great exampler, Mackheath; and comforts himself, that, notwithstanding he may be hanged for his robbery, he is no worse than his betters.

Mr. Gay's intention in writing that admirable dramatic satire, the Beggar's Opera, which was the subject of the above message to one of the Managers from Justice Fielding, was to lash the vices of the great; it was chiefly meant to be very severe satire upon the Ministry of that time, and particularly levelled at Sir Robert Walpole, who had greatly offended the author and his friends. Thus what proceeded originally from private resentment, produced, in its event, very great and manifest injury to the public.

The worthy Archbishop Herring foresaw the consequences which this admired Opera would produce; and, in a sermon at Court, very strongly pointed out the pernicious tendency of it to destroy morality in the lower class of the community, for which he was severely handled in a paper called the Intelligencer, said to be written by Dr. Swift, who, forgetting all temper and moderation, represented Dr. Herring as a most prostitute Divine, because his zeal animated him to preach against the Beggar's Opera.

As a matter of fact, the magistrates of Bow Street sent their request to the managers of both Drury Lane and Covent Garden, but while Garrick diplomatically consented to consider the matter, Colman abruptly refused to comply with their wishes. Charles Lee Lewes, in his *Memoirs,* 1805,[22] tells the story:

About the year 1772, Sir John Fielding was so very officious as to attempt a controul over the stage. He sent official letters to the managers of each theatre, Mr. Garrick, and Mr. Colman, advising them not to perform the Beggar's Opera, as he was convinced that the moral of the opera tended to increase, rather than suppress, the number of nocturnal depredators. Cunning Davy (who then had no operatical company, Vernon excepted) joined in opinion with the worthy magistrate, and actually sent him the following answer, that —— "highway and street roberies were now so alarming, he met sir John's idea in part, and should so far contribute to remedy the evil, as not to hold up in his theatre any representation that might in his (sir John's) opinion contribute to increase them." What answer did the laconic witty Colman return? I was on the stage at rehearsal, when Colman received Sir John's letter. After reading it he held it up to the whole company, and exclaimed —— "By G—d this [is] laughable, here's sir John Fielding attempting to reform the stage. Here, Joe, (Younger the prompter) give me ink and paper." He wrote the following answer, which was handed about previous to its being sealed, and sent by one Symonds, a porter of the theatre.

"Colman's compliments to Sir John Fielding, he does not think that his house

[22] IV, 156, note.

is the only house in Bow-street where thieves are hardened and encouraged, and will persist in continuing the representation of that admirable piece of satire, the Beggar's Opera."

Oxberry gives a different response:[23]

In 1773, the magistrates of Bow-street interfered, to prevent the performance of this opera, alleging, "that it tended to increase the number of thieves." Colman made the following reply:—"Mr. Colman is sorry to differ in sentiment from their Worships, but he is assured that his house is one of the few about Covent-Garden that do not *encourage* thievery!"

Fitzgerald, a much later writer, has still another report,[24] without mentioning his source:

"Mr. Colman presents his best respects to the magistrates, with whose note he has just been honoured. He has not yet had an opportunity of submitting it to the other managers, but, for his own part, cannot help differing in opinion with the magistrates, thinking that the theatre is one of the *very few houses in the neighbourhood* that does not contribute to increase the number of thieves."

Such statements, verbally unlike, denote hearsay information, but the contents are substantially the same, and may be accepted as fairly exact.

Cooke tells how

the late Sir John Fielding, whose judgment must be decisive in these matters, once told the late Hugh Kelly, on a successful run of "The Beggar's Opera," "that he expected a fresh cargo of highwaymen in consequence at his office"; and, upon Kelly's being surprised at this, Sir John assured him, "that ever since the first representation of this piece, there had been, on every successful run, a proportionate number of highwaymen brought to the office, as he would shew him by the books any morning he took the trouble to look over them." Kelly had the curiosity, and found the observation to be strictly true.[25]

The *Gentleman's Magazine* for 1773, in the yearly supplement,[26] contains a letter to Mr. Urban, headed "Forcible Reasons against Playing the Beggar's Opera":

The Beggar's Opera and its tendency having been of late the general topic of conversation, it may not be amiss to lay before your readers the following letter on that subject, which was printed, during the exhibition of that popular

[23] *Dram. Biog.* (1825-26) II, 100.
[24] *Hist. Eng. Stage,* II, 271-272.
[25] *Memoirs of Macklin* (1804), p. 64.
[26] XLIII, 652 ff.

entertainment, in one of the public papers. It was written we are informed, by the late William Duncombe, Esq.

Then follows a copy of a letter already quoted early in this chapter.[27]

An interesting pamphlet taking the opposite side is "A Letter to Sir John Fielding, Knt. Occasioned by His extraordinary Request to Mr. Garrick for a Suppression of the Beggar's Opera. To which is added a Postscript to D. Garrick, Esq.," by William Augustus Miles, printed in London in 1773, and dated September 18. The author takes Fielding to task for trying to prohibit *The Beggar's Opera* and accuses him of being "partial and oppressive." The following quotations will illustrate his point of view:

Your pretence for suppressing a dramatic entertainment universally admired, *is the dangerous effect it is supposed to have on the morals of the people,* and which by a calculation to the full as ingenious as it is unaccountable, you positively assert, "sends every time it is acted, one additional thief to the gallows."

Declaring "the absolute injustice done to the Opera," and scoring Fielding for his former connection with vice, he says "the request to Mr. Garrick was neither decent nor plausible." He asks, further, "in what manner, Sir, do you suppose this unfortunate Opera acts upon the minds of Men? Do you imagine that to *expose* vice is the same as to *encourage* it."

If Macheath makes one highwayman, Cato and Brutus may be supposed at least to make each a good citizen, and here we are amply recompensed for the injury done us by Mr. Gay. The filthy dialogues of Peachum, Lockit, and the rest of the Dramatis Personae at the time that they expose obscenity, reprehend it, and an audience (unless entirely composed of men similar to those who execute your orders) will not be converted to either profligacy or dissipation by the thoughtless gaiety of Macheath, or tempted by the indulgence he receives to make an excursion to Hounslow.—Almost every sentence of that admirable Opera contains a moral, and in condemning the representation of it you pay no extraordinary compliment to the character of Mr. Gay as a citizen, nor to the lord chamberlain who licensed it.

Then comes a more personal attack when the author boldly asserts, "and your very reasons for suppressing the exhibition of a favorite Opera, are without exception, the most impudent insult on the good sense of the nation I ever heard of"; and

[27] See *ante,* p. 230.

it certainly behoved you, before you censured the representation of the Beggars Opera, or the character of Mr. Gay to be careful that nothing on *your* part was wanting to reform the morals of the age, and that your conduct was irreproachable. . . . At present your concern for morality is only laughed at and despised, and your pretended aversion to the Beggars Opera regarded either as the effects of mere ignorance, or a wish to enlarge your consequence by extending your influence over the theatres.

He asks Fielding to recall his "extraordinary and ridiculous request." Garrick, he explains, would have given up the play if Colman had consented. But Colman defied Fielding's remonstance; and why should Garrick alone be expected to submit? Why is Drury Lane worse for *The Beggar's Opera* than Covent Garden? He insists that the justice's "request to Mr. Garrick was not made till after the Opera had been given out, and it was impossible the managers could recal it without offence to the Public, and perhaps injury to themselves." The ill success of Fielding's efforts is seen in the simple statement that "your defeat is a subject of merriment for the whole town."

The postscript to Garrick contains several passages appropriate for quotation:

If Mr. Gay had been alive I should have left him to vindicate the merit of his admirable Opera from the aspersions of Sir John Fielding. . . . The fatal effects unjustly attributed to the representation of the Beggars Opera imply ignorance, malevolence, or arrogance. . . . I considered the officious application of Sir John Fielding as a scandalous reflection at once on the good sense of the nation, and on the virtue of Mr. Gay, whose purity of manners, joined to an uncommon goodness of heart, ought at least to have preserved him from the imputation of endeavouring to corrupt the morals of his fellow citizens. . . . The moral of the Beggars Opera has been universally admired, and it is somewhat extraordinary that Sir John Fielding should have continued so long unacquainted with its effects. . . . If Mr. Gay had made a tragedy of his much admired Opera, and Macheath had been *executed*,[28] I have no doubt but Sir John would have expressed his entire approbation of it. The catastrophe would here correspond with his sanguinary disposition, and the magistrate might have considered it a justification of his practice. —— Unluckily the poet more humane concluded, that the well-timed interposition of mercy might be the means of reclaiming a thoughtless young man, whose vices were more the effect of fashion and example than depravity, and that of course it would have a better effect on the morals of mankind than a rigorous punishment. —— In

[28] Miles here has a footnote: "I have since been informed that Sir John Fielding earnestly requested you to *hang* Mackheath."

this instance he argued like a philosopher, and condemned the punishment of death as no less cruel than ineffectual. —— Perhaps he thought it unjust as well as severe.

This overdrawn defense of Gay closes with the ideas that "The hope of a respite which Macheath entertains" is "common to all men in his supposed unhappy situation"; that "the vulgar saying of *'While there is life there is hope'* is of greater antiquity than the Beggars Opera"; that "the heroism of Macheath is not contagious"; and that Sir John may have been stung by the satire on officers of justice. In this last idea Miles is no doubt completely off the track. The Bow Street magistrates must have been sincere in their attempt at prohibition on the grounds of public welfare. No political motives whatever and no personal feeling against either Colman or Garrick are apparent. Likewise, the play itself would hardly have incurred more than their official displeasure, and that not on account of the satire against men in public life.

From the *Whitehall Evening Post* for December 15, 1774, in a letter signed "Jack Ketch," we hear of the failure of the Fielding crusade and get a new outcry against the danger of Gay's opera:

> The rendering executions a public spectacle was morally designed by the Legislature to deter from vice, by presenting to the common view examples of the horrid consequences which so justly attend it. But such objects are unhappily become now no longer edifying, from the wreckless, hardened, and *Macheath* behavior of too many miscreants of the present age. . . .
>
> The Middlesex Justices had sense and virtue enough to represent, lately, against the exhibition of the Beggar's Opera; but their Remonstrance, like all modern ones, being disregarded, why had they not the spirit to have that dangerous piece presented by their Grand Jury, as a public nuisance? It had its effect, formerly, in raising the Hue and Cry against the Italian Banditti; but we have reason to fear, of late years, that it has rather encouraged the *English* one.

Practical proof of the official opposition to *The Beggar's Opera* in 1777 is found in the attempt of Captain Thompson to change the ending of the piece for Covent Garden,[29] and that of Garrick to provide a favorable conclusion at Drury Lane.[30] Such proposed reformations to suit the moral code of Bow Street, however much they would

[29] See *ante*, p. 75.

[30] See *ante*, p. 77, for the ridicule of a contemporary reviewer; and also p. 78 for a comment from 1778, belittling the current alterations.

have pleased the late Archbishop Herring, seem to have met with speedy failure, and to have neither helped nor hurt *The Beggar's Opera.*

Michael Kelly is responsible for a report concerning absolute prohibition of *The Beggar's Opera* by the government in Ireland in 1793.[31] The reasons of state were no doubt based on morality rather than satire, but as was the case with the veto of *Polly* in 1729 and the protest of the magistrates in 1773, the play concerned was only invigorated by being put under the ban.

A marked difference in attitude between the antagonists of 1773 or 1793 and a critic of the early nineteenth century may be noticed in the highly commendatory words of Hazlitt, writing for the *Examiner* in 1815. He scorns the omission of the tavern scene as a concession to the morals of the town.[32] Such alteration went on, however, being clearly shown in the later printed editions of the play which follow the actors' prompt-books. Cuttings of whole scenes and songs, as well as minor language expurgations, plainly point to a constant tampering with the text.

Aside from those who participated in the historical controversies over *The Beggar's Opera,* many later writers, several of them famous, have expressed their opinions for and against Gay's comedy. Some of the most important of these will not be out of place in this discussion, arranged in order of time to illustrate the prominence of the subject through the years.

The prologue written by the Rev. Dean Marlay for the private Irish performance of 1761[33] seems to defend the participation of the amateur cast:

> Thus, virtue's friends their native truth disguise,
> And counterfeit the follies they despise,
> By wholesome ridicule proud vice to brand,
> And into virtue laugh a guilty land.[34]

The *Dramatic Censor* for 1770, by F. Gentleman, finds some of the characters "not at all respectable by profession, but amusing and somewhat instructive from their conversation," and "some sophisti-

[31] See *ante,* p. 85.
[32] See *ante,* p. 92.
[33] See *ante,* p. 69.
[34] See Whyte's *Collection of Poems,* pp. 45 ff.

cal justifications of highwaymen, rather dangerous for dissolute minds." His main objections are more bluntly stated:

> What succeeds this scene, previous to the introduction of the ladies, and their conversation, however natural, are by no means proper for public representation; the dialogue has great spirit, and is enlivened by several smart repartees, but the subject of the action, and the characters are so much founded upon licentiousness, as not to be defensible; improper prejudicial ideas must arise, and we heartily condemn the whole from this principle, that vice is never more dangerous than when she smiles, covering her deformities with a veil of pleasantry.
>
> Indeed, apprehending Macheath in the midst of his jollity, by the treachery of two prostitutes, may convey good warning to some who associate with such wretches, yet we are apt to think this scene is more apt to inflame the passions than to correct the conduct of youth; and delicate taste must be offended at many sentiments too gross for its tender relish.

After pointing out minor objections, and granting commendation for the dramatist's merit in other respects, the author declares:

> Yet after offering this impartial tribute at the shrine of Gay's genius, it gives us concern to be under a necessity of remarking, that a moral was the last point in his view, if it entered there at all; and, in this respect, a gloomy cloud casts its dark shade over the shine of praise he must otherwise have commanded; if young minds, which indeed the music helps, leave a theatre untainted with any prejudicial impression after seeing the Beggar's Opera, if no foolish young person of either sex admires Macheath as any other than a diverting stage-character, if his shew and false courage do not delude the one sex, nor his gallantry attract the other, then the piece may stand as inoffensive; but we fear it does not often work an effect of such mediocrity, therefore are bold to call it a composition made up of ingredients much more noxious than salutary, so pleasingly relished, so flatteringly gilded, that scarce any eye or taste can resist the powerful temptation; it stands, like light and heat, alluring passions, which play like moths around it, till they fall a prey to the delusive object of their delight.

The writer concludes with this remarkable mixture of praise and blame:

> We have shewn that there is scarce any moral deducible from the Beggar's Opera; that it is, upon the whole, a loathsome, infectious carcase, cloathed in an angelic garb; that it is founded upon solid sense and satiric sense, yet rises into a superstructure of licentiousness; that it is highly entertaining, not at all instructive; that it is an exquisite burlesque upon Italian operas, and not a little so upon virtue; that it is inflammatory with humor and vulgar with elegance; in short, it is one of those bewitching evils, which offended reason

must wish had never been brought to light, while delighted taste must lament the very idea of its annihilation.

The opinions of Dr. Johnson and James Boswell given under date of 1775 in the latter's *Life,* and that of Dr. Johnson in his biography of Gay, are no doubt the most notable of the commentaries after the directly contemporary period. In view of the fact that the great critic himself was a rather strict moralist, the oracular utterances he has made in this connection assume considerable interest.

"The Beggar's Opera," and the common question, whether it was pernicious in its effects, having been introduced;—Johnson. "As to this matter, which has been very much contested, I myself am of opinion, that more influence has been ascribed to 'The Beggar's Opera,' than it in reality ever had; for I do not believe that any man was ever made a rogue by being present at its representation. At the same time I do not deny that it may have some influence, by making the character of a rogue familiar, and in some degree pleasing." Then collecting himself, as it were, to give a heavy stroke: "There is in it such a *labefactation* of all principles as may be injurious to morality."

While he pronounced this response, we sat in a comical sort of restraint, smothering a laugh, which we were afraid might burst out. In his life of Gay, he has been still more decisive as to the inefficiency of "The Beggar's Opera" in corrupting society. But I have ever thought somewhat differently; for, indeed, not only are the gaiety and heroism of a highwayman very captivating to a youthful imagination, but the arguments for adventurous depredations are so plausible, the allusions so lively, and the contrasts with the ordinary and more painful modes of acquiring property are so artfully displayed, that it requires a cool and strong judgement to resist so imposing an aggregate: yet, I own, I should be very sorry to have "The Beggar's Opera" suppressed; for there is in it so much of real London life, so much brilliant wit, and such a variety of airs, which, from early association of ideas, engage, soothe, and enliven the mind, that no performance which the theatre exhibits, delights me more.

Boswell also prints, as a footnote to the foregoing statement of Johnson, the following anecdote:

A very eminent physician, whose discernment is as acute and penetrating in judging of the human character as it is in his own profession, remarked once at a club where I was, that a lively young man, fond of pleasure, and without money, would hardly resist a solicitation from his mistress to go upon the highway, immediately after being present at the representation of "The Beggar's Opera." I have been told of an ingenious observation of Mr. Gibbon, that "The Beggar's Opera" may, perhaps, have sometimes increased the number of highwaymen; but that it has had a beneficial effect in refining that class of men,

making them less ferocious, more polite, in short, more like gentlemen. Upon this Mr. Courtenay said, that "Gay was the Orpheus of highwaymen."

The more "decisive" opinion of Johnson, as referred to by Boswell, is as follows:[35]

Of this performance, when it was printed, the reception was different according to the different opinion of its readers. Swift commended it for the excellence of its morality, as a piece "that placed all kinds of vice in the strongest and most odious light"; but others, and among them Dr. Herring, afterwards Archbishop of Canterbury, censured it as giving encouragement not only to vice but to crimes, by making a highwayman the hero, and dismissing him at last unpunished. It has even been said, that after the exhibition of The Beggar's Opera the gangs of robbers were evidently multiplied.

Both these decisions are surely exaggerated. The play, like many others, was plainly written only to divert, without any moral purpose, and is therefore not likely to do good; nor can it be conceived, without more speculation than life requires or admits, to be productive of evil. Highwaymen and housebreakers seldom frequent the play-house or mingle in any elegant diversion; nor is it possible for any one to imagine that he may rob with safety because he sees Macheath reprieved upon the stage.

Sir John Hawkins dwells at length in his *History of Music,* 1776, on the evil influence of *The Beggar's Opera.*[36] The voice of this writer, who was also chairman of the Bench of Justices of Middlesex, is typical of adverse opinion late in the eighteenth century:

The malevolence of the people, and the resentment which they had been taught to entertain against that conduct of administration which they were equally unqualified to approve or condemn, were amply gratified by the representation of it; but the public were little aware of the injury they were doing to society, by giving countenance to an entertainment, which has been productive of more mischief to this country than any would believe at the time; for, not to mention that the tendency of it, by inculcating that persons in authority are uniformly actuated by the same motives as thieves and robbers, and to destroy all confidence in ministers, and respect for magistrates, and to lessen that reverence, which, even in the worst state of government, is due to laws and to public authority, a character is exhibited to view, of a libertine endowed with bravery, generosity, of the qualities of a gentleman, subsisting by the profession of highway robbery, which he defends by example drawn from the practice of men of all professions. In this view Macheath is as much a hero as the principal agent in an epic poem; but lest this character should not be sufficiently fascinating to young minds, he is farther represented as having

[35] From *Lives of English Poets* (Gay).

[36] V, 316 ff.

attained to some degree of wealth, to keep good company, this is to say, gamesters of fashion, to be a favourite with the women, and so successful in his amours, that one is with child by him, and another he marries. In short, his whole life is represented as an uninterrupted pursuit of criminal gratifications, in which he has the good fortune to succeed, and in the end to escape with impunity. Nevertheless the vox populi was in favour of this immoral drama. . . .

The effects of the Beggar's Opera on the minds of the people, have fulfilled the prognostications of many that it would prove injurious to society. Rapine and violence have been gradually increasing ever since its first representation: The rights of property, and the obligation of the laws that guard it, are disputed upon principle: Every man's house is now become what the law calls it, his castle, or, at least it may be said that, like a castle, it requires to be a place of defence; young men, apprentices, clerks in public offices, and others, disdaining the arts of industry, and captivated with the charms of idleness and criminal pleasure, now betake themselves to the road, affect politeness in the very act of robbery; and in the end become victims to the justic of their country: And men of discernment, who have been at the pains of tracing this great evil to its source, have found that not a few of those, who, during these last fifty years have paid to the law the forfeit of their lives, have in the course of their pursuits been emulous to imitate the manners and general character of Macheath.

Charles Burney, in his *History of Music,* 1776-89, seems to agree with his fellow author, Hawkins:[37]

But who will now say . . . that our own Beggar's Opera, which burlesques the other [Italian], and comedies of Congreve and Vanbrugh, however excellent in other respects, are immaculate systems of ethics, and fit lessons for "the fair, the gay, the young," who chiefly frequent such places?

The embarrassment of the good Hannah More when she was accidentally present at a performance of *The Beggar's Opera,* after coming to see *Percy,* is revealed in her *Memoirs,* under date of 1778. The passage indicates the attitude of the moralists of the time:

At length, upon inquiry, I found that Lewis had been taken extremely ill, and that handbills had been distributed to announce another play. Many sober personages shook their heads at me, as much as to say—How finely we are caught. Among these were Mr. D——, the prebendary, who came under the same mistake; in another box was Dr. Percy, who, I vainly thought, looked rather glum.

The possible evil influence of Gay's comedy was talked in 1781, where we find the following reflections in the *St. James's Chronicle* for May 5, under "The Tea Table Tittle-Tattle":

[37] IV, 228.

If the agreeable Light in which the Beggar's Opera shows the Characters of Highwaymen and Pickpockets to the Eyes of the Vulgar, has ever been prejudicial to their morals—how much must the Morals of young Ladies, who have commonly more vanity than Prudence, be corrupted, by daily reading of the Transactions of Demireps at Masquerades, and other fashionable places, drawn in the most fascinating Colours—whilst they are only *eminent* for their *Infamy!*

John Nichols, writing in 1782,[38] quotes from a Mr. J. Whiston:

I believe his "Beggar's Opera" did more harm to unthinking youth, than all that Collins, Tindal, and Chubb wrote, ever did; for that gilded over iniquity with the veil of applause; and made a Hero of a debauched Highwayman. It encourages a daring thoughtlessness; and destroys the regard for serious consideration, so absolutely necessary for our proper behavior in life.

The opinion of this man, however, can hardly be respected when we find him, in the next sentence, accusing Gay of being the author of Colman's adaptation, *Achilles in Petticoats.*

A Discourse upon Stage Entertainments, by the Rev. David Simpson, published in 1788, tells a "true story, on which the Tragedy of George Barnwell is probably founded." An old gentleman takes his raw country nephew to the playhouse to see *The Beggar's Opera.* The uncle is so highly pleased that he tells the boy that if he were a young fellow again Macheath's character should be his. The boy eagerly imbibes "the baneful sentiment," and afterwards plunges into vice. Later he writes, blaming *The Beggar's Opera* for his ruin. This story, which sounds like a fictitious anecdote to prove a point of doctrine, is almost a return to the famous charges of Dr. Herring in 1728.

A very outspoken warning against *The Beggar's Opera* (if serious, and not merely satirical for the sake of entertainment) is found in *The Egg, or the Memoirs of Gregory Giddy, Esq.,* published in London without date, but apparently belonging to the latter part of the eighteenth century. Giddy sees the opera, is delighted with "the villainous hero," adopts his sentiments, and gathers the seeds of pollution. Yet he admits:

I secretly arraigned the conduct of the managers, and passed some unfavourable strictures on the poet; for I don't imagine that the morality contained in Mr. *Gay's fables* will ever eradicate the seeds of vice, sown by his *Beggar's Opera.*

[38] *Anecdotes of William Bowyer,* I, 703.

A few verse quotations will illustrate this idea.

> His op'ra certainly is very smart;
> But not one sentiment there can touch the heart;
> Beside, to immorality it tends,
> And vice with colours much too pleasing blends.

The excuse of artistic license, the writer continues, will be made.

> But is there need for those, who paint or write
> To bring forms hideous, or obscene to sight?
> To bring forth vice, too elegantly drest,
> Tempts us to copy what we should detest;
> Many on seeing gay *Macheath* have glow'd,
> To rise the foremost Champions of the road.

He concludes with this appeal to the reader:

> Then Oh! let's wish this captivating pest,
> In prudence by the managers supprest.

Anselm Bayly, sub-dean of His Majesty's Chapel Royal, in *The Alliance of Music, Poetry and Oratory,* 1789,[39] refers directly to the wickedness of Gay's work:

> Common spectators by not attending to the characters in comedy, perhaps incapable of discerning their intention, often mistake vulgarities for wit, satire for applause, and vices for virtues.
>
> What may be the dire consequences of such errors, it is easy to apprehend, and are too visible in the conduct of frequenters at public spectacles: Witness, for instance, The Beggar's Opera.

Bell's edition of the play in 1791 contains this statement in the preface: "The characters of this opera are *low* and *vicious*—the good here can derive no encouragement of virtue, the bad no discouragement of vice."

It was to such an assertion that Richard Cumberland replied in his "Critique on the Beggar's Opera," by way of preface to Cooke's edition of the play, London, 1791. He thinks the opinions of both Herring and Swift were perhaps exaggerated, but declares that "the validity of the censure of Dr. Herring, and the opinion of the magistrates will be questioned if one looks at the interview of Beggar and Player at the end of the Opera." He thus defends the purpose of the piece:

[39] P. 129.

The mind may be as strongly impressed by the deformity of vice as by the beauty of virtue; so that, by a natural representation of the effects on each, the exhibitions of the stage may be rendered as powerful dissuassives from the one, as incentives to the other. When the reasoning of the philosopher, or the admonition of the divine, fail in effect, men may be laughed or lashed out of their vices and follies by the ridicule and severity of the Comic Muse; and it would be lamentable, indeed, to reflect, that a work, replete with the finest strokes of humour, should be productive of those ills to society which some have attributed its representation; or that obnoxious characters cannot be displayed in their true colours, without having a baneful influence on the minds of men, to imitate those practices they are designed to expose.

Stockdale, editor of Gay's *Fables* in 1793, referring to Swift's defense of 1728, says:

This, it must be owned, was to the purpose, since the Beggar's Opera lay most exposed on the side of morality, and was then warmly attacked from the pulpit. It has even been said that after its exhibition the gangs of robbers were evidently multiplied. We believe they who extol its moral tendency, and those who declaim against its pernicious effects are equally wrong.

Like Johnson, he believes it was written merely to divert; "and in all probability has not sent a single adventurer upon the highway, or saved one thief from the gallows."

William Coxe, an eighteenth-century biographer of Gay,[40] however, is surprised at the stand taken by Johnson:

Surely Johnson could not seriously be of opinion, that a play which introduces such licentious scenes, which abounds with so many indecent ballads; which renders vice amusing instead of disgusting, and exhibits the inside of a prison as a scene of jollity and thoughtlessness, rather than of distress and repentance; cannot be productive of much evil; or that highwaymen and housebreakers seldom frequent the play-houses?

He cites Sir John Fielding for proof, and prefers his judgment to that of Johnson. He says the only possible moral of the play is that rogues are made to impeach each other:

but even this moral loses its effect, from the ludicrous manner in which it is constantly conveyed; in a strain of irony, which the common people do not comprehend. . . . The shouts of applause which burst from the gallery when Macheath is reprieved, fully prove that no permanent impression has been made by the awful truth affected to be inculcated in some of the scenes, that justice, sooner or later, overtakes the guilty.

[40] *Life,* prefixed to *Fables* (1796), pp. 32 ff.

At the very end of the century, in 1799, Kirkman, biographer of Macklin,[41] abruptly criticizes *The Beggar's Opera:*

> The plot of this piece is very indifferent, and as to moral, there is none. It is truly a compendium of licentious burlesque, and loathsome infectious immorality. The humour is vulgar, and the satire inflammatory; in a word, it is one of those bewitching evils, which offended reason must wish had never been exhibited to the world.

Cooke, also a biographer of Macklin, writing about the same time, both agrees and disagrees with Johnson. He concludes that Gay wrote with a moral purpose, though "it unfortunately happens, that courtiers are not in general shamed by the satire, nor highwaymen amended by the representation"; and he fears that "the representation of it has done infinitely more harm than good."[42]

Another writer who stresses the immorality of *The Beggar's Opera* is John Ireland, editor of Hogarth.[43] His statements are concise and positive:

> That it is countenanced by the public is an apology for the managers, "For they who love to please, must please to love"; but that it should have the sanction of the Chamberlain, is astonishing.[44]

He questions Johnson's decision that the performance of the play has not had the pernicious effect often ascribed to it:

> For the Doctor's talents and virtues I have a reverence bordering upon idolatry: in questions of morality he can seldom be contradicted, and without the strongest conviction that *in this point he is wrong,* I should tremble to dissent from his opinion; but my deductions are drawn from examples that to me are conclusive. With three instances that I had an accidental opportunity of seeing, I was very forcibly impressed. Two boys, under nineteen years of age,—children of worthy and respectable parents,—fled from their friends, and pursued courses that threatened an ignominious termination to their lives. After much search, they were found engaged in midnight depredations, and in each of their pockets was the Beggar's Opera.

[41] *Memoirs,* I, 239-240.

[42] *Memoirs* (1804), pp. 63-67.

[43] *Hogarth Illustrated* (1806), II, 324 ff.

[44] Ireland has a footnote here: "To the honour of Sir John Fielding, he once attempted to prevent its being performed, but the attempt failed. —— Since that time it has been so completely disfigured by Mr. Charles Bannister being disguised in the character of Polly, and Macheath personated by Mrs. Cargill, &c, &c, &c, that no person who had the least pretensions to taste, would be seen at such a drama in masquerade."

A boy of seventeen, some years since tried at the Old Bailey, for what there was every reason to think his first offence, acknowledged himself so delighted with the spirited and heroic character of *Macheath* that on quitting the theatre, he laid out his last guinea in the purchase of a pair of pistols, and stopped a gentleman on the highway. . . .

The accumulation of similar facts is not necessary. Those who think that lively dialogue, and natural though vulgar repartee, can atone for what gives new attractions to vice, will, I suppose, continue to sanction this performance by attending the representation.

Mrs. Inchbald, in the preface to her edition of the play in 1808, finds this fault with Gay's piece:

It fails of moral precept. —— Nor is that accusation all; it has the fatal tendency to make vice alluring. The skill of the author is here supremely excellent, though it is grevious he did not show it in a better cause; for, who, but Gay, could have made highwaymen, thieves, and cheats of every denomination, endearing to the delicate, the elegant, and even the honourable spectator?

William Hazlitt is the great modern defender of the reputation of *The Beggar's Opera*. In frequent comments on the subject he seems to go out of his way to praise the wares of Gay in the Newgate comedy. In a newspaper review of a performance of October 23, 1813,[45] he shows his enthusiasm at its height:

Its merits are peculiarly its own. It not only delights, but instructs us, without our knowing how, and though it is on first view equally offensive to good taste and common decency. The materials, indeed, of which it is composed, the scenes, characters, and incidents, are in general of the lowest and most disgusting kind; but the author, by the sentiments and reflections which he has put into the mouths of highwaymen, turnkeys, their wives and daughters, has converted the motley groupe into a set of fine gentlemen and ladies, satirists and philosophers. What is still more extraordinary, he has effected this transformation without once violating probability, or "o'erstepping the modesty of nature." In fact, Gay has in this instance turned the tables on the critics; and by the assumed license of the mock-heroic style, has enabled himself to *do justice to nature,* that is, to give all the force, truth, and locality of real feeling to the thoughts and expressions, without being called to the bar of false taste and affected delicacy. We might particularly refer to Polly's description of the death of her lover, and to the song, "Woman is like the fair flower in its lustre,"[46] the extreme beauty and feeling of which are only equalled by their characteristic propriety and *naïveté*. Every line of this sterling Comedy sparkles with wit, and is fraught with the keenest and bitterest invective.

[45] See *View of English Stage.*

[46] A misquotation of Gay's line.

It has been said by a great moralist, "There is some soul of goodness in things evil"; and The Beggar's Opera is a good-natured, but severe comment on this text. The poet has thrown all the gaiety and sunshine of the imagination, the intoxication of pleasure, and the vanity of despair, round the short-lived existence of his heroes, while Peachum and Lockitt are seen in the back ground, parcelling out their months and weeks between them. The general view of human life is of the most refined and abstracted kind. With the happiest wit, the author has brought out the good qualities and interesting emotions almost inseparable from humanity in the lowest situations, and with the same penetrating glance, has detected the disguises which rank and circumstance lend to exalted vice. It may be said that the moral of the piece (which some respectable critics have been at a loss to discover), *is to shew the vulgarity of vice;* or that the sophisms with which the great and powerful palliate their violations of integrity and decorum, are, in fact, common to them with the vilest, most abandoned and contemptible of the species. What could be more galling than the arguments used by these would-be politicians, to prove that in hypocrisy, selfishness, and treachery, they are far behind some of their betters? The exclamation of Mrs. Peachum, when her daughter marries Macheath, "Hussey, hussey, you will be as ill used and as much neglected as if you had married a Lord," is worth all Miss Hannah More's laboured invectives on the laxity of manners of high life!

In a *Round Table* paper, "On Actors and Acting,"[47] Hazlitt considers *The Beggar's Opera* a sort of moral vaccination:

To shew how little we agree with the common declarations against the moral tendency of the stage on this score, we will hazard a conjecture that the acting of the Beggar's Opera a certain number of nights every year since it was first brought out has done more towards putting down the practice of highway robbery, than all the gibbets that ever were erected. A person, after seeing this piece, is too deeply imbued with a sense of humanity, is in too good humor with himself and the rest of the world, to set about cutting throats or rifling pockets. Whatever makes a jest of vice leaves it in too much a matter of indifference for any one in his senses to rush desperately on his ruin for its sake. We suspect that just the contrary effect must be produced by the representation of George Barnwell, who is too much in the style of the ordinary's sermon to meet with any better success.

Another essay, "On Reading New Books,"[48] expresses Hazlitt's impatience with those who cannot take their *Beggar's Opera* straight and whole: "Is it not provoking with us to see the *Beggar's Opera* cut down to two acts, because some of the allusions are too broad, and others not understood?"

[47] Originally printed in *Examiner,* Jan. 25, 1817.
[48] Contributed to *Monthly Magazine,* July, 1827.

Blackwood's Magazine for August, 1818, contains an article on the "Proposed Reform of the Beggar's Opera." It is a semi-humorous satire, written by someone wishing to expose the prudishness of those who have recently trimmed the play to suit contemporary conditions.

William Oxberry, in the "Remarks" prefixed to his edition of 1821, takes the offensive:

> To sum up the whole, the "Beggar's Opera" is totally subversive of the chief object of the drama. . . . It can improve none but thieves and prostitutes; for it exhibits the vices of such people only; the lesson is addressed but to them. And as to the pleasure it may afford, very little of favour is to be said; the delight received from the music is not to be set to the score of the writing; and if we were to allow all its claims of amusement, the scale would weigh heavily against it, when we consider that such amusement can only serve to degrade and brutalize the taste.

This and other such strong language reveals a thorough lack of sympathy with the piece at that time nearly a hundred years old. It is curious, under such conditions, that Oxberry, as well as Bell and Inchbald, should have included the play in a collection of English dramatic works.

The "Remarks" to a reprint of *The Beggar's Opera* in the first volume of the *British Drama* of Jones and Company, 1824, give a different kind of opinion in the same period:

> This fortunate opera has been generally thought to give vice additional attraction by exhibiting it in a pleasing form; in this respect, the example of the hero and its general influence have probably been much over-rated; but the scruples of the present refined age may well hesitate to admit the moral pretensions of this work.

Some of the "Remarks" printed in John Cumberland's edition of 1826 are worth quotation:

> Of the merits of this Opera as a corrector of public morals, various opinions have from time to time been given. Of the comic humour there can be but one opinion; but whether it be of a good or evil tendency, is the point upon which issue is joined. That the humor is farsical and the characters most depraved we are ready to admit.
>
> We have before observed . . . that it is better to attack follies while they are follies, and before they grow into sins, than it is to exhibit rank profligacy upon the stage;—we say so still, although we are disposed to express a favorable opinion of "The Beggar's Opera."
>
> The *title* of the "Beggar's Opera," is, perhaps, its best apology. It prepares

the reader for scenes of life in the lowest degree of human society. It is evident that Gay intended it as a satire (and a most bitter one it is) on the follies and vices of the great. He brought forward no person of rank, nor any of education, to put a gloss upon vice, and to make it tolerable; but he kept vice down amongst thieves and strumpets (to whom it belongs, if it belong to any body,) and by so doing he gave the better classes of society an opportunity of looking down to see how it worked.

Gay was a man of better taste than to suppose that the affairs of such people could interest a polite audience; therefore, in the speeches of Peachum and his wife, of Lockit, Filch, Macheath &c, his object must have been to show us the natural consequence of a long familiarity with vice. The drift of the Beggar's Opera was to show that by entering upon and pursuing vicious courses, persons might in time be brought to converse coolly about picking of pockets, of the gallows, and obtaining "blood money."

One thing in this Opera we highly approve, and that is, the thieves and strumpets do not, at the latter end, disgust the audience with repentant whinings. God forbid that any should die without repenting of their sins! but stage repentances are always offensive to the better part of the audience. Let the bad be put to shame and confusion on the stage, but let them be sent off the stage to repent in private. Gay's rogues and strumpets no doubt repented before they were hanged, or after a due measure of fasting, of castigation, picking oakum, or knocking hemp.

In contrast to the foregoing attempt to read an ethical import into *The Beggar's Opera* is a refreshing fragment of criticism found in John Cumberland's edition of 1829, in the preface signed "D——G."[49] The writer says:

If any young hero should take to the road, in emulation of Macheath, we can only say, that Don Quixote was not more crazy, when he sallied forth in quest of adventures, after reading those pernicious books of knight-errantry. We cannot afford to lose so much wit, for the bare possibility that Macheath and Filch may find imitators. . . . Gay must not be suffered to die, that rogues may live.

Such comment is only a minor part of the morality agitation, but it is further proof that hardly an editor or publisher of the play at this time could resist his fancied obligation to take sides, no matter how far he missed the mark, on a question that had remained one of the real dramatic issues of the day.

Americans should be interested in the opinion of Josiah Quincy, as recorded, with comment, by William Dunlap in 1832:[50]

[49] Assigned to George Daniel in B.M. catalogue.

[50] *Hist. American Theatre,* pp. 64 ff.

The opponents of the theatre published an extract from Josiah Quincy's Journal, dated May 11th, 1773. . . . "Went to the playhouse in the evening, saw the Gamester and Padlock performed. . . . But as a citizen and friend to the morals and happiness of society, I should strive hard against the admission, and much more the establishment of a play-house in any state of which I was a member." This gentleman afterwards, on seeing the Beggar's Opera in London, says, "The stage is the nursery of vice, and disseminates the seeds far and wide with an amazing and baneful effect."

It would have been well if this distinguished patriot had given us facts, or any mode of deriving how he draws such conclusions from such premises. The Gamester and Padlock, particularly the first, one would suppose could not warrant the estimate he forms of the stage. . . . The Beggar's Opera has been censured, but the mind that could be injured by such a piece of satire must be weak indeed.[51] Even if the pieces were in fault, it is no argument against a theatre any more than a vile book is against the press.

The Rev. John Genest, so frequently referred to in this volume, should be allowed a word on the subject, speaking in 1832. In general he seems to side with Johnson and Hazlitt, though rarely giving his own opinion. Once, in telling of a performance at Bath in 1821, he comes forth briskly to condemn the new taste of the times:

the females who performed them [the women of the town] were so delicate, that, tho' they repeated the dialogue, they took care the audience should not hear it—in this moral age even actresses turn prudes.[52]

Two very condemnatory statements were made by George Hogarth toward the middle of the nineteenth century, one in his *Memoirs of the Musical Drama,* 1838, and the other in his *Musical History,* 1845. Forgetting or missing the spirit of Gay's satire and burlesque, he writes in the earlier work:[53]

One cannot touch pitch without being defiled: nor can the mind become familiar with profligacy and indecency without contamination. The piece is merely a display of different forms of depravity. Every character is vicious and debased, with the exception of Polly; and she, so situated, is felt to be a moral impossibility, for the purity of her character could not have lived in such an atmosphere of pollution. Attempts have latterly been made to diminish the grossness of the exhibition; and certain scenes, which were always represented five and twenty years ago, have since been omitted, as being offensive to common decency. Characters, sentiments, and language, so calculated to sully the minds of ingenuous youth, are carefully kept by parents from the

[51] For an American branch of the morality question, see *ante,* p. 112.

[52] III, 221 ff.

[53] Vol. II, Chapter ii. See also *post,* Appendix section III, note to p. 249.

view and knowledge of their sons and daughters in every situation except within the walls of our national theatres. Recently, however, the *Beggar's Opera* has been rarely performed. Whether this has arisen from a growing sense of its impropriety, or from the want of fitting representatives of the hero and heroine, we shall not pretend to say. We believe that its licentiousness has contributed, no less than its wit and beauty of its music, to the favor it has so long enjoyed; but it may be presumed that the time is come, or at least approaching, when its licentiousness will banish it from the stage, notwithstanding its wit and the beauty of its music.

That such a prophecy was not being fulfilled is shown, aside from the actual stage history of the piece, by this writer's second statement, seven years later, in his other work on the same subject:

It had an unprecedented success, owing partly, no doubt, to its simple and beautiful melodies, but much more to its wit and licentiousness. Its original popularity is not surprising, considering the state of the theatre of that period; but its still continuing to be performed, in defiance of public decency, says little for the boasted improvement in the morality of the stage.

Taine, the French critic, in his *History of English Literature,* 1863, exaggerates to absurdity the suggested coarseness and evil influence of Gay's work. He observes that the high society satirized does not find the manners presented repulsive to them, and that the realistic features

by no means disgust the ladies, who applaud from the boxes. They sing the songs of Polly; their nerves shrink from no detail; they have already inhaled the filthy odors from the highly polished pastorals of the amiable poet. . . . A cruel keenness, sharpened by a stinging irony, flows through the work, like one of those London streams whose corrosive smells Swift and Gay have described; more than a hundred years later it still proclaims the dishonor of the society which is bespattered and befouled with its mire.[54]

The extreme statement of Taine is the following:

This laughing careless poet, to revenge himself on the minister, wrote the *Beggar's Opera,* the fiercest and dirtiest of caricatures. In this opera they cut the throats of men in place of scratching them; babes handle the knife like the rest.[55]

One might judge from the latter sentence that the French critic had read this English dramatic work by proxy, or with very little understanding.

[54] Book III, Chapter iii (translation of Van Laun).
[55] Book III, Chapter vii.

Even Charles Dickens shared the controversy about the morality of *The Beggar's Opera*. In his preface to the 1867 edition of *Oliver Twist*, defending himself for his own treatment of low life, he discusses Gay's contribution to the literature of roguery:

> In every book I know, where such characters are treated of at all, certain allurements and fascinations are thrown around them. Even in the "Beggar's Opera," the thieves are represented as leading a life which is rather to be envied than otherwise; while Macheath, with all the captivations of command, and the devotion of the most beautiful girl and only pure character in the piece, is as much to be admired and emulated by weak beholders, as any fine gentleman in a red coat who has purchased, as Voltaire says, the right to command a couple of thousand men, or so, and to affront death at their head. Johnson's question, whether any man will turn thief because Macheath is reprieved, seems to me beside the matter. I ask myself, whether any man will be deterred from turning thief because of his being sentenced to death, and because of the existence of Peachum and Lockit; and remembering the captain's roaring life, great appearance, vast success, and strong advantages, I feel assured that nobody having a bent that way will take any warning from him, or will see anything in the play but a very flowery and pleasant road, conducting an honourable ambition, in course of time, to Tyburn Tree.

W. Clark Russell, the novelist, as late as 1872,[56] finds that "the result of the introduction of Jack Sheppard on the stage as a hero must illustrate and confirm the objections of the opponents of *The Beggar's Opera*."

Seilhamer, one of the few historians of the American stage, sees the ultimate degeneracy of *The Beggar's Opera:*

> Whether it was that Kean was a very great favorite, or that the taste of New York had become so vitiated in a few months as to prefer a play of loose character to one of virtue, the pernicious "Beggar's Opera" drew a larger house than that which had assembled to witness Addison's dull but virtuous "Cato."[57]

Gregor Sarrazin, in his *John Gay's Singspiele*, 1898, brings the long list of conscientious objectors almost down to date. The German critic, while praising Gay for the moral tendency of his social satire, expresses this belief:

> The taste and finer customs of this century have made it [*The Beggar's Opera*] impossible, if only on account of the bluntness of the language. The satire has lost its point; composition and characterization are easily recognized

[56] *Representative Actors*, p. 86.
[57] *Hist. American Theatre* (1888), I, 9.

as faulty; and many scenes, in fact most of the third act, impress the modern mind as positively injurious.[58]

Naturally, when *The Beggar's Opera* appeared again in 1920 the morality question was opened anew. Most of the comment, of course, was from the historical or artistic standpoint, with little that savored of controversy. One opinion, however, from the *Spectator,* at the time of the revival in London, almost lines up with the opposing sentiment of 1728. The writer tells how the play originally appealed "to the debauched taste of the better vulgar," and then diplomatically softens its temper for our own period:

> But happily corrupt works of art, like crude and heady liquors, lose their bad qualities by age and keeping. A fierce brandy, a hundred years old, becomes mild and agreeable. So Gay's opera, in its day capable of debauching the debauched, will now do no harm and increase the gayety of the town.

Against this attitude should be placed a refreshing bit of humor from the *Freeman,* February 2, 1921, about the New York performance of *The Beggar's Opera.* The writer first wonders whether "visitors to the Greenwich Village Theatre will henceforth be marked and suspected men," and then he philosophically proclaims, "It may be well for the good name of Mr. Hopkins that the present so-called national crime-wave got fully under way before 'The Beggar's Opera' came to town!"

A bright and comprehensive statement of the general view of the modern British public is found in this quotation from the columns of *Truth,* June 8, 1921:

> Before the war the morality and language of "The Beggar's Opera" were held to make it quite unfit for public performance. The production a year ago was to some extent the result of the revival of old English plays given by the Stage Society before the Phoenix was separately constituted. Many people wondered how much of Gay's wit would pass the Censor, and how long the public would tolerate it. Mr. Playfair's courage has been rewarded. He has given us the original with hardly any cuts; his audiences take it all as cheerily as their ancestors in the days of George II. I have even heard it commended by clergymen for its clean and wholesome humour. Its popular success is a public protest against nastiness and silliness—a sign of the times that gives hopes for a real raising of standards in our theatres.

In spite of the opinion of Mr. Hewlitt, who has called *The Beggar's Opera* "a decadent night's entertainment, spiced for jaded appetites,

[58] Translated from the German.

like devilled bones after a revel," the creed of a writer for the Literary Supplement of the *London Times,* July 27, 1922, will appeal to many followers of Gay: "You can no more measure yards by ounces than you can measure Macheath, Polly, Jenny, Peachum, and the rest by the Ten Commandments or even by the laws of England."

The many preceding quotations, most of them given without additional comment, show the extent of the morality question regarding *The Beggar's Opera,* a question which, in these days, should be easily dismissed. Every reader of such opinions, on either side, as well as of the play itself, will form his own conclusions. It will be obvious, however, to the student of Gay's literary satire and burlesque that many people have taken his piece too seriously. The testimony, when sifted down, hardly incriminates; and the injury of this merry stage entertainment, except in rare instances, has been largely the product of fertile imagination. Many, while highly praising the play for dramatic and musical merit, have been afraid it *would exert* a dangerous influence on the popular mind. Internal evidence favors the irresponsible desire of Gay to divert his audience; external evidence against the play usually sounds like exaggeration. It was only to be expected that a piece so popular as *The Beggar's Opera,* so often acted and printed, and so much talked about, should arouse opposition in some direction; everybody could not be satisfied. It was immediately attacked as a new type of illegitimate drama, and as a political satire; naturally enough it had to face the suspicion against a play of the underworld.

It is true that Gay employs the scenes, actions, and conversations of low life, all refined for his purpose, but the realism of his play only reflects the coarseness of the age, without the conventional veneering. In that respect *The Beggar's Opera* is very true to life, as true as the pictures of Hogarth.[59] In treatment of character and situation Gay is much more wholesome than the dramatists of the Restoration, and no more blunt at times than the Elizabethans. It would be absurd to-day to insist on modern standards for judging a play of the early eighteenth century, especially a travesty like *The Beggar's Opera.*

The bone of contention in 1728 and through the years seems to have been the fact that the hero highwayman goes unpunished, along with the idea that vice and crime are rendered attractive. It is the

[59] For discussion of this point see *ante,* pp. 173 ff., and *post,* p. 277.

example of the comedy that is censured, not Gay's social philosophy, or his language and scenes of low life. It is true that the nineteenth century expurgated the text, thereby suiting the play to current taste at the expense of the humor, but the majority of critics have not mentioned the verbal coarseness at all. As to the thwarting of poetic justice in the reprieve of Macheath, that will bother no one who accepts Gay's own clever explanation in the conclusion. The waggery of the change of fate to suit the demands of the town for happy endings, even if the moral is destroyed, is delicious. To those who require a tragic ending as the necessary climax, *The Beggar's Opera* can have no appeal whatever. Cumberland's opinion, already given, is obviously sound; vice is not triumphant in Gay's opera burlesque.

It is also certain that Gay intended no moral in *The Beggar's Opera,* no serious message for his time. His was a message of song and jollity, with some sound satirical advice thrown in for good measure. He was not aiming to expose low life or attack the rogues in humble places; and he was not aiming to glorify low life or exalt its characters. His dramatic representation of the underworld was only a means to an end: to get novelty, as well as to draw a parallel for his satire on high society. Gay did not try to make the highwayman, by profession, a character for emulation; he did make him fashionable for the conversation of the fine ladies, and there was little danger in that! Unfortunately the Puritans missed the worthy lessons of the play, which are really there, without hurting the fun, if we wish to find them.

We may smile at the solemnity with which *The Beggar's Opera* was sometimes taken (or avoided) by earnest people who really believed it was a child of Satan; but theirs was the same righteous fear that has lingered down to our own time in the protest against certain types of yellow fiction and melodramatic motion pictures. Speculation as to how many youths have become apostles to the art of Jesse James, or common burglars, from these two sources would be about as profitable as the discussion of the morality of *The Beggar's Opera.* At any rate, too much credit has been given to Gay's piece for influence over the realm of conduct. Men like Sir John Hawkins actually overlooked the fact that vice and crime had existed prior to 1728, and that immediately before the production of *The Beggar's*

Opera, especially for a period of about eight years, robberies and cases of theft had been too numerous to remember.

The morality disturbance did very little to hurt *The Beggar's Opera,* and must always have been good advertising. Many people would be curious to inspect the entertainment so severely condemned in certain quarters, and would therefore help Gay to grow richer, and Rich gayer, by their investigation. The opera, on its side, was rendered no more obnoxious by the attacks against it than it had been before; and there were countless playgoers who were willing to risk their better selves at a performance, even if, as some early critics said, the music made the viciousness of the comedy attractive, and the constant attendance on Gay's piece was proof positive of a degraded national taste.

To conclude—Gay has no moral purpose in his play, and he has no immoral purpose through a deliberate desire to picture vice in agreeable form; instead, he is unmoral in *The Beggar's Opera.* He is one of the crowd himself, while the characters are going through their paces on the stage as he intended. He is leaning forward and slapping his knee. He almost cries with Polly and her people, yet he always laughs at them. His operatic world is realistic, but it is the world of musical burlesque.

CHAPTER XXII

THE BEGGAR'S OPERA AS A PLAY

IT was not in the drama that the eighteenth century found itself; and it is not on dramatic work that the reputation of John Gay would rest were it not for his happiest composition, *The Beggar's Opera*. Gay is famous for his Newgate comedy, not his other ventures on the stage. The history of the piece shows clearly that it was fitted for production and that it possessed the qualities necessary to long life. It was the first ballad opera, and it has remained the best; it is not an example of mere theatrical fashion, but an original work which at once became a favorite and which has long survived. The recent rejuvenation of *The Beggar's Opera* both in England and America is proof enough that the play goes well as acting drama, even with certain alterations to suit the present day. No piece, perhaps, ever was so much tampered with through the years; for the sake of convenience, novelty, or the public morals all sorts of experiments were made during its long career since 1728. Yet the inevitable result has been general success, regardless of the style of playing, the amount of music, the kind of costume, or the change in setting. What, then, are some of the characteristics of this lucky play, which became so bright a spot in a period of dramatic decline?

The plot, reduced to a minimum, is very slight, indeed,—a slender story, however diverting, that has no great dramatic force of itself: Macheath, captain of a gang of highwaymen, has secretly married Polly Peachum, whose father, a thief-taker, captures her husband for a reward. In prison he is embarrassed by his engagement with Lucy, the keeper's daughter, who, on persuasion, manages his escape. He is retaken, condemned, reprieved, and obliged to have one wife at last. This plot is considerably embellished by the disputes of Polly and Lucy over the hero, and the conversations of the rogues with whom he associates. The charm of the narrative is mainly circumstantial. Without the many songs, also, the play would be a short one and somewhat bare.

A SCENE FROM THE BEGGAR'S OPERA

(Act III, Scene xi.)—This painting, by Hogarth, in the National Gallery, London, is here reproduced, with permission, from the print by W. A. Mansell & Co.

The construction of the play is worth examination. The piece is cut up into numerous scenes, which to the modern reader may seem a burden; yet this very division is responsible for a brisk, staccato sort of movement which never lags, but keeps the action changing often, like a moving picture. With this variety of scene and incident, to afford relief through the work as a whole, Gay seems to have planned a simple thread of events on purpose, to get a contrast with the extravagant adventures of Italian opera and heroic tragedy. Peachum's house and Newgate prison occupy the foreground. Most of the scenes begin in the middle of the action, like those of modern comedy. The situations are cleverly manipulated, leading up to theatrical surprise and even dramatic climax (one is almost tempted to say melodramatic burlesque), as in the tavern scene where Macheath is betrayed by the women of the town. One incident leads naturally into another and arouses proper curiosity. The first entrance of Macheath, in Act I, and his appearance among his men in Act II are well timed and skillfully introduced.

The omissions made in later acting versions do not necessarily indicate that *The Beggar's Opera* was found to be too long and poorly arranged. The changes were largely matters of theatrical custom or managerial caprice. Some of them really did better the play for current conditions; others destroyed the motivation of plot and character. If Gay's three-act comedy with songs was too lengthy, the two-act version of the nineteenth century was not an improvement in the other direction. It is fortunate that the production of the revival in 1920 has preserved the salient features of the original opera in a three-act version that still does honor to Gay.[1] The most outrageous alteration during the long stage history of *The Beggar's Opera* was the omission of the two essential scenes of Beggar and Player, which so piquantly explain the point of the things between. The bizarre ending of the mock opera, which changes a hanging into a dance, becomes a stupid anticlimax without the Beggar's literary satire, and the title loses its meaning entirely.

The time of acting, after Gay's death, naturally varied with changes in stage production. Oxberry, in 1818,[2] gave the length of performance as two hours and forty-two minutes, with the half-price

[1] For comment on the text of this production, see *ante*, pp. 101-102.

[2] Acting version of the play.

rate commencing about nine o'clock. The 1920 production requires approximately two hours and a quarter. Compare these figures with those printed in the *Dramatic Time-Piece,*[3] 1767, which has three hours and five minutes for the whole performance. The latter must come close to the original time of representation.

Wrapped up in his management of parody or satire, some of it to music, Gay has apparently taken little trouble to characterize his people with delicate pains. They fall, however, into distinct groups, and some of them, even a few minor ones, are strongly individual. They are different from other stage people of Gay's time, but typically English. The play throughout is full of human nature, though the take-off on heroic and sentimental drama and Italian opera is obvious. The treatment is purely objective on Gay's side, with no expression of the poet's despondency, or bitterness, if he had any, over his fancied misfortunes. Good humor is paramount, even in the lines that are treated with apparent gravity. At the same time the characters have not, even in the plainest satire, become caricatures; they are real people, staying naturally in their own disreputable sphere, with a touch of splendor to gloss their imitation of high life. Every important part gives a chance for artistic acting.

The *dramatis personae,* as a whole, is an interesting one. The characters, in a sense, are all humor characters, though their types do not prevent particular delineation. Some of the names, like Peachum, Lockit, Filch, and Trapes, suggest the livelihood of the owners, and thus hark back to the humor characters of Jonson or Restoration comedy. There is an exact balance of men and women, not counting the Beggar and the Player, and mere attendants,—twelve on each side. Perhaps Gay has kept the promise of his Introduction as to a proper equality of the parts of Polly and Lucy, and added something for good measure. The highwaymen are evened up by the women of the town. The singing parts are also well divided. The major rôles are economized to real advantage, but there is a motley crew of incidental people to furnish out a *chorus* befitting a musical comedy. Several of the parts are capable of being doubled, and were thus often conveniently used in actual performance. Some of the characters were dropped in later years; some of those retained

[3] A rare book, copy of Prof. J. R. Crawford, of Yale University.

were badly distorted as the original cast and the purpose of the dramatist were forgotten.

Gay has attempted only six important parts—Macheath and his two loves, Peachum and his wife, and Lockit, and they have all become historic. The rest are subsidiary and, with the exception of Filch and Diana Trapes, have only a collective connection with the plot. The Beggar and the Player, by the very nature of their *external* appearance, can hardly be considered real members of the cast.

Of all the characters, Macheath, in spite of the traditional popularity of Polly Peachum, easily takes first place. It is about him that the story turns and much of the humor is concocted. He is a hero highwayman, a character, say what you will, that has always been pleasant for us to read about, if not to meet on the open road. Macheath herds with gentlemen gamesters and common robbers alike, but maintains his politeness, chivalry, and gaiety to the end. Perhaps he is a gentleman born, who through losses at the table has been obliged to seek the fortunes of the road. He possesses plenty of dash and vigor as a knight of the hold-up, but is courteous to his *clients* and dislikes brutality and murder. He never descends to the level of his men; his dress is better, as well as his language. His honor and faith to his friends are articles of his moral code. In mood he ranges from rough courage to melancholy, but never despairs. Some of Gay's finest burlesque on tragic characterization comes in the scenes just before Macheath is freed from his sentence. As Sims Reeves, the actor, said of the part in 1889,[4]

> For any of these characters [certain operatic parts] to raise a laugh, a smile, or even the faintest symptom of hilarity, would be fatal to the impersonation. Macheath, on the other hand, may be as lively as he pleases; the livelier the better.

In the presence of his ladies, he is sentimental on short notice, carefree under reproach, and sly in his duplicity. His amorous disposition is his point of genius—and vulnerability. When we consider that, in addition to his dears of Hockley in the Hole, Vinegar Yard, and Lewkner's Lane, he gallantly lays claim to Polly and Lucy, and is in turn claimed by the "four wives more" of one of the closing scenes, we are surely impressed with his capacity for romance and his stal-

[4] *My Jubilee*, p. 233.

wart valor in the social sphere. Taken from every angle, the character of Macheath, for originality of execution, even regardless of the spirit of burlesque, is notable in the history of English drama.

In his review of a performance of July 25, 1816,[5] speaking of one side of the hero's character, Hazlitt has the following pointed comment:

> Macheath should be a fine man and a gentleman, but he should be one of God Almighty's gentlemen, not a gentleman of the black rod. His gallantry and good-breeding should arise from impulse, not from rule; not from the trammels of education, but from a soul generous, courageous, good-natured, aspiring, amorous. The class of the character is very difficult to hit. It is something between gusto and slang, like port-wine and brandy mixed. It is not the mere gentleman that should be represented, but the blackguard sublimated into the gentleman. This character is qualified in a highwayman, as it is qualified in a prince. We hope this is not a libel.

Polly Peachum, ever since the days of Lavinia Fenton, has been a favorite. Whether read about or seen upon the stage, she has preserved the simpleness, and daintiness, and sweetness that Gay, even in his scheme of operatic travesty,—in which at times she must appear to represent the trusting heroine,—no doubt intended to present in contrast to her evil surroundings. The thief-taker's daughter, though a product of low life, is pictured as an innocent, earnest lass who looks at the world through big, round, credulous eyes; and who, never seeing through the falseness of her lover, adores him before and after his *execution*. Gay seems to want us to believe that the Captain really cares for Polly, though often deceiving her when his other amours are close to exposure; that his affair with her is different, being real romance. Polly, for all of the fact that we smile at her artlessness, remains a charming representative of her sex, a rose among thorns.

Lucy Lockit, the rival of Polly for Macheath, takes on some of the sordidness of Newgate, where she lives under the shadow of the criminal world. She is a simple girl, bilked of her virtue and easily gulled by explanations, but she is capable of jealousy and revenge, as well as coarseness and vulgarity of speech and manner in her fits of anger. Lucy is no meek person, forgiving her heart's unhappiness; she is a spitfire on demand. Her passionate temperament is just the

[5] *On the English Stage*, under date of July 27, 1816.

opposite of Polly's. Yet in the presence of the diplomatic assurances of her idol, she forgets and melts into an intensely likable character, one we actually sympathize with before we remember that the whole business is laughable in the extreme. Lucy is altogether suited for the third member of Gay's immortal triangle of Newgate.

Peachum, receiver of stolen goods, and thief-taker, is a sordid individual who represents the grimmer side of Gay's farcical atmosphere. He is a prince of knaves, living on a slightly higher plane than his associates. He is also a philosopher, and something of a humorist. At least he makes a keen study of human nature, and uses it shrewdly to his own advantage. He has got good money by his crookedness, and is willing to obtain more by hanging Polly's husband. He has lived "comfortably" with his wife, without marriage, but he hints at relations with Mrs. Trapes, and more than once indicates that his morals are ideas, not ideal. The character is strong in its individuality; there is only one Peachum.

Mrs. Peachum is an impetuous woman who is often shocked by her husband's plans, but always decides to agree. If she loves her daughter, she has a clownish way of showing it. Her views on murder and matrimony are highly interesting. Her notion of family honor, which invites the captain to a game of quadrille, but draws the line at a son-in-law, is unusually picturesque. Mrs. Peachum, though appearing only in the first act, is a positive force there, and her influence is an integral part of the play as a whole.

Lockit is the running-mate of Peachum, and partakes of several of his traits of villainy. The sentiments of the two rogues are practically the same. Gay has done a fine piece of work in making them so plainly birds of a feather without blending their plumage. Lockit is the great jailor of English drama. He is proud of his position, partly because it yields returns and partly because it gives him an official capacity that makes him no common gentleman under the crown. He has fewer lines than the other major characters, but his is not a minor rôle. He does not appear till the second act, when he replaces Mrs. Peachum, who drops out entirely, but thenceforth he contributes significantly to the development of plot and setting.

Of the lesser characters, Filch occupies a place all by himself. He is such a droll young rascal that we admire him even while we are watching our pockets or nominating him for a reformatory. He shows

a very conscientious, ambitious attitude toward his trade, and receives the applause of his betters with considerable pride. Filch does not say much, but his lines count.

The gang of highwaymen, who open the second act, are an artistic creation. They have been heard of before in Peachum's lists, and appear a second time toward the end of the play; but here in the famous tavern scene they literally capture the reader or the audience. Disreputable in dress and character, they are such a "Set of practical Philosophers," and such hail fellows well met, that they sweep the stage. Their standards of work and thinking are not low, but extremely high—from their point of viewing the world. Their socialistic or revolutionary doctrines contain some of the sharpest satire. Their conversation, much to our surprise, is not inelegant. There are no rough speeches and oaths of the road; instead, we find the very manners of good society. What a galaxy of rogues—Mat of the Mint, Ben Budge, Jemmy Twitcher, Crook-finger'd Jack, Wat Dreary, Robin of Bagshot, Nimming Ned, and Harry Padington! The very names are refreshing. Peachum sketches the characters of some of them as he reads from his "register of the gang," and Gay allows each to speak for himself at least once. There is not much distinction, however, between the members of this party of robbers. Mat of the Mint seems to be the boldest and rashest, and the principal spokesman. Even in his occasional speeches we recognize the mouthpiece of Gay's satire, which is developed by all the men together, without any chance for specific characterization.

With the women of the underworld it is somewhat different. From Diana Trapes to the least of the ladies, the portraits are rather plainly drawn. Mrs. Trapes, whose profession is made possible by men like Macheath, knows the ways of the female as well as her betters, and talks about her customers and the styles of the time like an expert artist of costume. As for the women of the town, Macheath describes them himself as they appear in answer to his summons in the tavern scene. The ladies are direct counterparts of the figures of high society, in dress, actions, and topics of conversation. The names are highly seasoned: Mrs. Coaxer, Dolly Trull, Mrs. Vixen, Betty Doxy, Jenny Diver, Mrs. Slammekin, Suky Tawdry, and Molly Brazen,—suggesting, almost as well as their words, the life of the London demimonde. This group of eight compares very favorably (or

unfavorably) with the group of eight highwaymen whom they follow on the stage. The picture of Macheath and his numerous tavern companions, though suggesting the loosest associations, is so delicately painted and so daintily expressed that most of the scene can be played at the present time with an artistic glamour around it.

Gay's people in *The Beggar's Opera* include many who never appear on the stage, but whose names, mentioned frequently, help to create that atmosphere of roguery and low life which pervades the piece as a whole. Such unimportant personages as Tom Gagg, Ned Clincher, Brother Tom, Slippery Sam, Curl-pated Hugh, Tom Tipple, Black Moll, Betty Sly, and Suky Straddle are as intimately introduced, through a casual reference, as if they were of long acquaintance with us.

It is this sense of realism that makes *The Beggar's Opera* like a visit to an actual place. The play is never bookish; it does not smell of the lamp or the library. Its spirit of freedom is almost Elizabethan. It is spontaneous and fresh in tone, full of ease and informality, in spite of the poet's life in formal drawing-room and palace. There is the greatest difference between Gay's conventional classical poetry and his vivid local-color scenes here. It is at this point that the author of the *Fables* surprises us by being the author of *The Beggar's Opera*. For true atmosphere, Gay's other picture of London life, *Trivia*, of all his works, comes closest to his illustrious comedy. The same observation that enabled him to sketch the streets of the capital put some of the best scenes into *The Beggar's Opera*. The dramatist knew the city at first-hand, and he reproduced one side of it with which he had become acquainted, registering genuine names, making direct allusions, and using familiar material to the utmost. If Gay had called his piece *The Newgate Opera* he could not have found a more appropriate title. Aside from the London setting, the tone of the play is typically English, making a realistic appeal—in story, characters, and style—to the English people.

In dialogue, Gay has secured some of his best effects. Most of it is natural and full of flavor, helping to create a setting, denote character, and advance the plot. Sometimes it sounds extremely modern in tone, as when Macheath protests, "But seriously, Polly, this is carrying the Joke a little too far." The style of the conversation

ranges from the rough words of Mrs. Peachum when lecturing Polly to the polite gossip of the women of the town or the eloquent speeches of the gang. The plain passages are almost journalistic in their copy of the common talk of the period. The language, throughout, furnishes a fresh spot in the midst of other plays of artificial verse and stilted prose. Gay probably put less time on *The Beggar's Opera* than on some other works, but because the style of it does lack the polish and classic precision of his formal writing it approaches, in part, the familiar style of Goldsmith and Sheridan. At the same time it attains an epigrammatic quality akin to that in the better Restoration comedy. While some of the lines are ordinary in their narrative and descriptive function, some also are very cleverly made and witty in expression. On the whole, a certain incisive manner is habitual,—a sort of literary target practice. Many of the scenes end with proverbial remarks, and throughout the text there are numerous quotable passages, some of which have often been reprinted.

Other characteristics of the dialogue may be pointed out. Much of the phraseology of the characters is colored and rendered comic by the spirit of burlesque, as in some of Macheath's assurances to his sweethearts, often almost simultaneously. Likewise the operatic form of the piece gives opportunity for parody by the use of figures of speech sprinkled plentifully through the play. Soliloquy, then in good form in legitimate drama, and certainly not out of place in ballad opera, is also found, at times lending a humorous impression. The asides, as well as the occasional long speeches, may perhaps be excused in an operatic farce. Gay seems to have aimed to substitute for the customary recitative of opera by using plain dramatic dialogue in prose; thus the material between the songs may be said to serve a double purpose. The dialogue, also, though always leading up to the songs, is not mainly an excuse for them, as is so frequently the case in modern musical comedy.

The Beggar's Opera possesses, along with a vast amount of good sense and humanity, a liberal supply of wit and humor, some of it very subtly delivered. The play is a low-life comedy, but it is never low comedy. Its comic value lies chiefly in its quaint mixture of grave and gay. It has always been easy, on that account, to overestimate or underestimate the piece. There have been many people who saw

the point of the satire and burlesque, and there have been others who took the play as seriously as if it had been "a down-right deep Tragedy," and felt every heart throb of Macheath and his loving duet. Regardless of its reception, however, *The Beggar's Opera* has in its dialogue and its general spirit of fun some of the keenest and most delicious wit of the century, and some of the most pungently humorous turns of character and situation in the history of the stage. The highly improbable reprieve, without warning, is an illustration of all these qualities together. Gay has some powerful irony at times, but it is always lightened by the cheerful and diverting tone of its surroundings. His good-natured touch gives an air of geniality and jollity everywhere. The opera (we had better call it ballad farce, which is really its comic type) is merry even in its heaviest moods; this levity of treatment in the hour of sadness adds much to the jauntiness and whimsicality of the work. The changing relations of Polly and Lucy, for instance, provide one of the funniest things in the play. Their hatred for each other turns to spite, fear, respect, and sympathy as the action deepens and their mutual husband faces his fate. When Macheath stops to sing a song before he is ready to attend his guards to the Old Bailey, we realize that the ends of operatic farce are being met and we enjoy the Captain's misfortune much more than we should his escape. Gay as a wit and a humorist in *The Beggar's Opera* stands midway between Congreve on one side and Fielding and Sheridan on the other, but his originality is supreme.

In connection with the discussion of Gay's wit and humor, it is interesting to put together two comments, nearly a hundred years apart. Swift wrote in 1728: "Now I take the Comedy or Farce, (or whatever Name the Criticks will allow it) called the Beggar's Opera, to excel in this Article of Humour. And upon that Merit, to have met with such prodigious Success, both here, and in England."[6] Directly opposite is the opinion of William Oxberry, the actor, who though finding several comic situations in the piece sees "not a solitary line of humor, not a gleam of wit from its beginning to its end."[7] He considers the play a "holy relic," the original success being due to human caprice and the popularity since to tradition. After reading

[6] From *Intelligencer* article quoted in *Mist's Weekly Journal,* July 6, 1728.

[7] Ed. of 1821.

the latter we feel perhaps that this theatrical gentleman should have been tutored by William Hazlitt.

As to the poetry of *The Beggar's Opera,* the sixty-nine songs, treated elsewhere in connection with the music and the ballad originals, contribute greatly to the literary value of the play. The piece is so fully a lyrical drama that about one-fourth of the lines are in verse. Gay's genius for graceful song writing found invitation here, and it would be hard to say to what extent the first success of his opera on the stage depended on the poetic qualities introduced, made possible by the use of music. Anyhow, Gay's fame as a poet has been much increased by *The Beggar's Opera.* A ballad opera being largely a lyrical performance, the dramatist here seems almost to take a place secondary to that of the poet. Cibber, a contemporary of Gay, speaking of the latter's achievement in *The Beggar's Opera,* asks:

> Yet, on the other side, must we not allow, that to have taken a whole Nation, High, and Low, into general Applause, has shown a Power in Poetry, which though often attempted in the same Kind, none but this one Author, could ever yet arrive at?[8]

A writer in the *Grubstreet Journal* paid early compliment to Gay's poetic talent in *The Beggar's Opera.*[9] Speaking of *The Devil of a Duke* and its songs, he makes a comparison:

> Mr. Philips says, in his Essay on song-writing, that Songs, like Epigrams, should turn on a point of wit. Such are those in the *Beggar's Opera,* which are mostly Epigrams; and which, with their poignancy, give a pleasure without the aid of music. But in this farcical-ballad opera, I can find none turned in this manner.

Taken as a whole, the songs are unusually original and appropriate to the plot, with catchy versification. Some of course are insignificant or unnatural, on account of the idea of burlesque; others, fanciful in texture, transcend their setting. It is difficult to pick a group of songs from the sixty-nine in *The Beggar's Opera* and call them best, but the following twenty, listed in order of use, will perhaps come nearest to having intrinsic merit as lyrics, both romantic and frivolous, aside from their music and their special function in the play: "'Tis Woman that seduces all Mankind," "Virgins are like the fair Flower in its

[8] *Apology,* Chapter VII.

[9] Sept. 28, 1732.

Lustre," "Our Polly is a sad Slut," "Can Love be controul'd by Advice?", "O Polly, you might have toy'd and kist," "I, like a Ship in Storms, was tost," "Oh, ponder well!", "My Heart was so free," "Fill ev'ry Glass," "Let us take the Road," "If the Heart of a Man is deprest with Cares," "Youth's the Season made for Joys," "Man may escape from Rope and Gun," "How happy could I be with either," "Cease your Funning," "I like the Fox shall grieve," "In the Days of my Youth," "Come, sweet Lass," "Which way shall I turn me?", and "The Charge is prepar'd." The others serve their purpose and cannot be overlooked. It is true, however, that there may have been too many songs for a three-act comedy with as much dialogue and stage business as *The Beggar's Opera,* and that the frequent omissions later were rendered necessary.

When we consider the literary influence of *The Beggar's Opera* we are bound to recognize the fact that Gay is not merely a writer of comic opera. He is, of course, the founder of a school of ballad opera, which flourished widely after 1728 and led ultimately to Sheridan, and Gilbert and Sullivan; and he anticipates in his features of drill and dance some of the spectacular effects of modern musical comedy. But he opens up many other lines of development and works in fields that produce an original harvest. *The Beggar's Opera* made the lyric especially attractive for use on the regular stage, and showed a new method of introducing music and dance. It also stimulated song culture throughout the nation. Besides, it paved the way for a different type of stage burlesque, like Fielding's *Tom Thumb* and Carey's *Chrononhotonthologos*. It was responsible, too, for bringing political satire forcibly on the stage, and making it artistic.

As a rival of legitimate plays, along with pantomime, *The Beggar's Opera* was to help in breaking another theatrical tradition. Quite involuntarily, no doubt, it revolted against classicism and conventionality, finding thus its satire on Italian opera, heroic tragedy, and sentimental comedy. It also was to take its part in the opposition to the five-act drama, which was old as *Gammer Gurton's Needle* and *Gorboduc* on the English stage. Gay's three acts, among the very first to stand alone, furnished a pleasing contrast to the five acts of the majority of comedies; and by becoming so widely known exerted a real influence, if we may judge by the later work of writers like

Fielding and Foote, who seem to have taken up the battle for a shorter dramatic scale. If Fielding "drank confusion to the man who invented the fifth act of a play,"[10] Gay must have proposed the uncomplimentary toast. It is not unreasonable, then, to assign to Gay a share in working changes in the very form of English comedy. Another interesting fact may be observed: almost without exception, *The Beggar's Opera* was used as the main play for an evening's entertainment, being often acted in the eighteenth century with shorter or minor plays on their first appearance. Thus it can logically be credited with the instigation of many of the afterpieces then greatly in vogue.

Finally, though there have been many *crook* plays, and many plays dealing partly or wholly with crime and prison life, *The Beggar's Opera* was the first to make the English drama of rascality really popular. This it did by a blending of romantic treatment and realistic background, with the assistance of music. Gay's work in the field was almost definitive; his opera has become the classic sign of the *species crook,* and has never been quite supplanted on the stage. His artistic handling of low life has also undoubtedly had influence on the rogue stories of English fiction. William Howitt, writing in 1846,[11] says of *The Beggar's Opera* that it cannot "be denied that it has given birth anew, in the shape of novels, to Newgate literature." Gilfillan, going further, thinks "it created a large robber school in the drama and novel; for instance, Schiller's Robbers, Ainsworth's Rookwood and Jack Sheppard, and Bulwer's Paul Clifford and Eugene Aram, not to speak of the innumerable French tales, and plays of similar kind."[12]

The endurance of *The Beggar's Opera* is one of the curiosities of English literature. After studying the piece, however, and better still, seeing it performed, one is likely to decide that it has real literary merit, being a good acting play and a good reading play, though its vigor of style, its spirit of burlesque, and its wonderfully fine old music almost require the stage. Operatic trifle though it may be, it has stood the test of time, both in several thousand performances and in over a hundred printed editions, including French and German

[10] See Preface to G. B. Hill's ed. of Boswell's *Life of Johnson.*

[11] *Homes and Haunts of British Poets.*

[12] *Memoir* of Gay, prefixed to *Fables,* 1859.

translations. It remains one of the important stock pieces of English drama.

After we make excuses for its original theatrical success,—such as the time of the first production, the early players, the party spirit, the reaction against Italian opera, and the appeal of native tunes,—we are forced to admit that to-day, two hundred years young, *The Beggar's Opera* carries clever comedy and alluring music, and by its very originality, and at the same time universality of contact, is still pleasing dramatic hosts in direct competition with the plays of 1923. Gay must be given credit for considerable dramatic genius, if he cannot be granted an even quality of dramatic excellence. At least he adapted his fare remarkably to the human palate, with all its variations, giving it both sweet wine and sour, both white meat and brown.

APPENDIX

I

BALLAD OPERAS

THE following annotated list of ballad operas appearing closely after *The Beggar's Opera*[1] will show to what extent Gay unconsciously founded a new school of drama. There were probably other pieces of the period which should come under this classification, but those given here, over a hundred in all, no doubt include the most prominent successors.

Such a list plainly disproves the statement of a recent writer on theatrical subjects:[2] "A dramatic novelty that originated in the second half of the eighteenth century was the musical farce and operatic drama,[3] for although *The Beggar's Opera* was the progenitor of it all, it did not find imitators for many years." It also corrects a misleading statement found in Kidson's *British Music Publishers,* to the effect that ballad opera editions range from 1728 to 1733, after which the ballad opera began to decline. The author says there was one, however, *An Hospital for Fools,* printed by Watts in 1739, a piece I have not even listed, on the ground that its music was contributed by Dr. Arne. The year 1733 does seem to be the high-water mark of ballad opera production, having the largest number, but the movement does not end there.

Many of the operas of this catalogue were published by John Watts, in the style of *The Beggar's Opera.* The music is often printed from wooden blocks and prefixed to each song, as in the second edition. Since one air was frequently used in many different operas, no doubt the original plate was retained from piece to piece.

The division dates recorded here refer to stage production, except in the case of operas not acted, but printed.[4] The theatres where the pieces were presented are listed almost completely. The place of pub-

[1] I have listed none of the period after 1760.

[2] H. B. Baker, *London Stage,* one vol. ed., p. 157.

[3] It is this second period of eighteenth-century comic opera that I have only referred to and not discussed.

[4] The order of entry is alphabetical within separate years.

lication, unless otherwise noted, is London. From contemporary magazines and newspapers I have been able often to give the month when publication was first advertised. A few of the works entered have evaded discovery in extant published form; some of these may be ballad operas mainly in name, but all thus described in old printed records have been included. Some operas which have a large amount of specially composed music may in this way have crept into the list. Direct imitators of the title of *The Beggar's Opera* are given, regardless of contents.[5]

1728

Penelope. By Thomas Cooke and John Mottley. Hay. Pub. May, 1728, during the original run of Gay's piece. Three acts, prologue and epilogue; 14 songs, 3 to B.O. airs. The Preface says, "Our intent was to try the Dispositions of our Countrymen towards Wretches in a low Sphere." A satire on Pope's *Odyssey.* Ulysses and Penelope are here an English sergeant and a landlady of an alehouse.

The Quaker's Opera. By Thomas Walker, the first Macheath. Lee's and Harper's Booth, B.F. Pub. Aug., 1728. Three acts and introduction; 26 songs, 1 to B.O. air. The Introduction consists of a dialogue between an Old Quaker and a Player about the immorality of the stage. The overture is led up to as in B.O. The scene is Newgate. An adaptation of *The Prison Breaker, or the Adventures of John Sheppard.* The *Biog. Dram.* says: "This is one of many very indifferent pieces which the warm sunshine of applause that *The Beggar's Opera* had met with hatched into life. Mr. Walker, moreover, might have another motive to make him hope success in a ballad opera, from the great approbation he had been favoured with in the part of Captain Macheath."

1729

The Beggar's Wedding. By Charles Coffey. First performed at Dublin and at Hay., 1729, in 3 acts, and then reduced to one act, as *Phebe, or The Beggar,* and played at D.L., 1729. Pub. May, 1729. The original version has 56 songs, several to B.O. airs; the shortened version only 32. The prologue tells how now on the stage

[5] For the description of certain works inaccessible to me, use has been made of Sonneck's *Catalogue.*

Special abbreviations for this list are: B.O., for *Beggar's Opera;* Sonneck, for *Catalogue of Opera Librettos;* G.F., for Goodman's Fields theatre; and B.F., for Bartholomew Fair.

. . . only Tricks and Transformations please,
Since deprav'd Fancy lords it o'er the Town,
And the best Plays and Actors can't go down.

Furthermore,

Now to harmonious Nonsense Wit gives way,
And Song and Dance or damn or save a Play.

Ev'n Shakespear and soft Otway must submit,
For Supernatural is the reigning Wit.

Thus Sing-Song only can be sure of Praise,
And Congreve must to Johnson[6] yield the Bays.
In strict Compliance to the present Taste
A Modish Opera is to Night your Feast ——
A Begging one . . . And that throughout the Nation
Has been, you'll own, too too long, Sirs, the Fashion.

The play resembles the B.O. in its beggar theme and atmosphere; in its naming of characters (Cant, Swab, Drap, Blouse, etc.); and in several specific scenes and situations. The end of Act I seems modeled on the parting scene which closes Gay's first act:

Hunter. Must we then part so soon? ——
Phebe. —— —— One last farewel ——
Hunt. One dear —— one soft Embrace —— and now —— ——

Air XX.

Since we must part . . . my Love, adieu
But oh! I die to leave thee . . .

Scene ii of Act II seems an imitation of Gay's tavern scene. Here the women of the town converse about their preference as to men, liquors, and so forth. The use of constables later in the play is also suggestive.

The Cobler's Opera. By Lacy Ryan. L.I.F., 1729. According to Rich's account book this play, performed on April 26, was the only ballad opera to interrupt the run of the original. Pub. April, 1729. There are 30 songs. The piece is closely patterned after the B.O. There is an Introduction of Player and Cobbler. Harry Pyefleet is the leading character, with two loves, Jenny and Peg; the latter is with child by him, suggesting the case of Lucy Lockit. Jenny tries to run away with Pyefleet, but a press-gang capture him, and the girl arrives in time for a tender parting scene. An order comes unexpectedly from the admiralty instructing the gang to leave off impress-

[6] Apparently a reference to Charles Johnson, author of *The Village Opera.* His piece, however, had small success.

ment, and Harry reënters and takes Jenny into his arms. The setting is Billingsgate, with one scene at the Gun Tavern. The *Craftsman,* April 20, 1728, says, "We hear that there is now in Rehearsal and will be performed next Friday at Lincoln's-Inn Fields Playhouse, a new Entertainment called the *Cobler's Opera,* for the Benefit of Mr. *Hippesley,* who has so long entertained the Town in the Character of *Peachem;* in which it is said that *pretty Polly* his Daughter is degraded into an Oyster Girl." A writer in the *Daily Journal,* April 24, says, after having attended a rehearsal of *The Cobler's Opera,* that "the Reception of the Humour is doubtful, it following an Entertainment of such delicate Variety as the *Beggar's Opera.*"

The Devil upon Two Sticks, or The Country Beau. By Charles Coffey. D.L., 1729. Pub. 1729. An alteration of *The Country Squire.*

Flora. Attributed to John Hippisley, the original Peachum, and also to Cibber. Sonneck favors the authorship of Cibber. L.I.F., 1729. Pub. 1729. Two acts; 24 songs. According to the title-page, this is "Mr. *Dogget's* Farce of the Country-Wake, alter'd after the Manner of the Beggar's Opera." Also published as *Flora, or Hob in the Well.*

Love and Revenge, or The Vintner Outwitted. Anon. Hay., 1729. Pub. Nov., 1729. Three acts and prologue; 37 songs, 1 to B.O. air. An operatic version of *A Woman's Revenge, or A Match in Newgate.*

Love in a Riddle. By Colley Cibber. D.L., 1729. Pub. 1729. Three acts, prologue and epilogue; 55 songs, airs not named. The *Biog. Dram.* makes the mistake of saying, "This was the first piece written in imitation of *The Beggar's Opera.*" In the Prologue the author declares:

> Good Song will always Candid Hearers bring;
> Provided—we find Airs, which they Themselves may sing.
> And English Song, ill sung, will please Good-nature.

Hence he wishes to "let old Songs go round." In the Epilogue he defends his opera thus:

> Since Songs, to Plays, are Now-a-days,
> Like, to your Meals, a Sallad;
> Permit us then, kind Gentlemen,
> To try our Skill, by Ballad.

His reference to Italian opera and Gay's remedy is significant:

> When Warbling Dames were all in Flames,
> And for Precedence wrangled,
> Our English Play cut short the Fray,
> And home again they dangled.

In one place Cibber uses a string of verses, with the tune changing, as in the medley of Macheath; this imitates Gay's device or is directly patterned after the Italian style. Victor thus criticizes Cibber's selection of music; "In this Pastoral the Author had introduced several difficult Italian airs, which coming just after the well-adapted Tunes in the Beggar's Opera, appeared not only dull, but truly ridiculous." This piece, later in 1729, was reduced to a ballad farce called *Damon and Phillida,* with 15 airs.

The Lover's Opera. By W. R. Chetwood. D.L., 1729. Pub. May, 1729. One act and prologue; 43 songs. Sonneck lists a second ed. with 39 songs, and a third with 32. Chetwood says in his Preface: "This Attempt being begun soon after the Run of the Celebrated *Beggar's Opera* (to mention which gives me some Confusion, while I am speaking of my own weak Endeavors) the Reader may perhaps find some few Tunes since made use of in other Entertainments of this Kind. I must declare the Songs thereto were made before I ever saw any such Performances—and had Leisure permitted me, I had alter'd 'em —Such as it is, I throw it on the Mercy of its Auditors." This statement indicates that at least one ballad opera writer took pains to get a new set of tunes. *The Lover's Opera* contains some ideas and phrases, as well as some figures in the songs, reminding us of the B.O.

Momus turn'd Fabulist, or Vulcan's Wedding. By Ebenezer Forrest, after the French of Fuzelier and Le Grand. L.I.F., 1729. Pub. Dec., 1729. Three acts and introduction; 42 songs. According to the title-page this is written "After the Manner of the Beggar's Opera." The Introduction of Player and Gentleman attempts Gay's style. Such topics as the taste of the town and the encouragement of the Muses are discussed. There is one direct allusion to the first ballad opera:

> *Player.* And so this may properly be said to be *The Opera* of the *Gods.*
> *Gent.* Right, Sir!—And I wish you may get as much by the *Gods* as you did by the *Beggars.* Tho I have no Proportion of Merit.

Some of the songs seem to work over ideas of those in the B.O.

The Patron, or The Statesman's Opera. By Thomas Odell. Hay., 1729. Pub. May, 1729. Two acts and epilogue; 18 songs, 1 to B.O. air. The general style of the B.O., in its satire of statesmen and courtiers, is attempted.

Polly, "an Opera. Being the Second Part of the Beggar's Opera." By John Gay. Not acted till 1777, revised. Pub. March, 1729. The

Preface is dated March 25.[7] Three acts and introduction; 71 songs, 2 more than in B.O., but no duplicates of those in part one. Not so many old ballad tunes are used, however. The Introduction of Poet and Player discusses the nature of a sequel, Italian opera, and so forth. In this sequel Gay transports some of his characters (Polly, Macheath, Jenny Diver, and Diana Trapes) to the West Indies, in a fantastic plot which furnishes a complete contrast to the realism of the Newgate comedy.[8]

Southwark Fair, or The Sheep-shearing. By Charles Coffey. Pub. Sept., 1729. The *Biog. Dram.* says it has only three scenes, and seems to have been used as a sort of droll for a fair.

The Village Opera. By Charles Johnson. D.L., 1729.[9] Pub. Feb., 1729. Three acts; 63 songs, 1 to B.O. air. Many of the songs use the meter of some in the B.O., and present similar ideas, figures of speech, and general wording. Sonneck lists an ed. of 1729 with only 53 songs. The *Biog. Dram.* says, "This is one of the many imitations of *The Beggar's Opera.*" Busby calls it "one of the innumerable musical dramas produced by the extraordinary success of the *Beggar's Opera.*"[10] The piece was noticed in the *Craftsman,* January 25, 1729: "We hear that the Town will be soon entertained, at the Theatre Royal in Drury Lane, with a *New English Opera,* called *The Village Opera,* written by Mr. *Johnson;* and as this Performance bears a very good Character, we doubt not that the Publick will give it a favourable Reception, and shew that their late Treatment of *another Piece*[11] did not proceed from any Prejudice against *That Company* in general. For as it is a regular Comedy in *low Life,* interspers'd with Ballads, to *known English Tunes,* we believe it will prove a very agreeable Entertainment, though neither the *Airs* nor the *Voices* are *Italian.*" Bickerstaffe worked this opera over into his *Love in a Village.* It was also used for *The Villagers,* a farce acted at D.L. in 1756. One of the best of the ballad opera sequence.

The Wedding. By Essex Hawker. L.I.F., 1729. Pub. May, 1729. One act; 23 songs, and overture by Dr. Pepusch. This piece is called a "tragi-comi-pastoral-Farcical opera; with an Hudibrastick Skimmington." The *Biog. Dram.* says it is *The Country Wedding and Skimmington* "with some trifling omissions." The latter, also pub. in

[7] Sonneck (p. 885) incorrectly gives March 15.
[8] See Chapter XX.
[9] Sonneck (p. 1136) incorrectly gives C.G., not yet built in 1729.
[10] *Hist. of Music,* p. 506.
[11] Cibber's *Love in a Riddle.*

1729, and acted at D.L., has 25 songs. It is thus described in the *Biog. Dram.:* "This piece is only one long scene, on a bank near the Thames' side, at Fulham, with twenty-five airs in it, after the manner of *The Beggar's Opera,* and was composed for the young company to act in the summer." In view of the facts that publication of *The Wedding* was advertised in May and that *The Country Wedding* was written for summer use, it is more likely that the latter is the alteration, with some slight additions. The dialogue of *The Wedding* is written in heroic couplets. Now and then there is something to suggest the B.O., as in song vii,

> Wou'd up Holbourn I were sailing,
> In a Cart to Tyburn-Tree!

1730

The Author's Farce: and the Pleasures of the Town. By Henry Fielding. Hay., 1730. Pub. 1730. Three acts, prologue and epilogue. There are 27 songs in all, 5 to B.O. airs, but only one in each of the first two acts. The rehearsal introduced is in ridicule of the rage for Italian singing. Fielding's title comes close to the B.O.

Bayes' Opera. By Gabriel Odingsells. D.L., 1730. Pub. April, 1730. Three acts and epilogue; 49 songs, 3 to B.O. airs. The *Biog. Dram.* says, "This is one of the many musical pieces which the *Beggar's Opera* gave birth to." The whole piece is a satire and burlesque on pantomime and buffoonery as having supreme sway then in England. On p. 3 the author says, "You are here to suppose that *Cantato* (for so I call *Italian* Musick) is in Possession of the Government, but closely pursu'd by his most potent Rival *Pantomime.*" A part of the Preface is interesting: "The only view of this Performance was to expose the Folly and Absurdities of a prevailing (and, as I thought, vitiated) Taste; which seem'd to prefer Farce and Buffoonery, as well as the unprofitable, immoral and unnatural Representations of Poetical Fiction, to the more polite and instructive Entertainments of Dramatick Poetry and Musick." Later he says that the piece was "not intended to entertain by Ballad-Singing; which was only accidental to the Design; or rather a means to enliven the Burlesque Scheme." He continues, "It has been urg'd, in a Place where I cou'd wish Scandal and Defamation might never enter, that this Performance was aim'd to expose the Celebrated Author of the Beggar's Opera and his Works; but to clear me from this abhorr'd Aspersion,

I shall want no other Vindication than what I am sure to find from the candid Judgment of that ingenious Gentleman."

The Chambermaid. By Edward Phillips. D.L., 1730. Pub. Feb., 1730. One act; 28 songs, 1 to B.O. air. Taken from *The Village Opera.*

The Clown's Stratagem, or Marriage and Hanging. Anon. Pub. May, 1730.

The Fashionable Lady, or Harlequin's Opera. By J. Ralph.[12] G.F., 1730. Pub. 1730. Three acts; 68 songs, 5 to B.O. airs. The *Biog. Dram.* calls it "one of the many motley compositions of speaking and singing, to which the great success of the *Beggar's Opera* gave birth." Ralph works a rehearsal idea, with Mr. Ballad and Mr. Drama talking together. Drama says (p. 3): "To be free with you, Gentlemen, *Mr. Ballad* really imagines he has a Share in this same Opera. You must know, he sent me a whole Quire of Songs, adapted to old Tunes, and made Collections among his Friends, of all the Doggrel Stuff they had ever scribbled to their Mistresses, to help me on with my Design, forsooth!" On p. 2 of the text there is an allusion to *The Beggar's Opera:*

Modely. Abominable Comparison! a Parish-Clerk and *Senesino!* an *English* Opera, and *Radamistus!*

Ballad. An *English* Opera and *Rad – – – dad – – da – – –* Confound this *Italian!* it ties up a Man's Voice like the Appearance of a Ghost at Midnight. —— Look ye, Sir, there is a certain *English* Opera that shall be nameless ——

Mode. I tell you, old Gentleman, you talk like a Madman, —— that very Opera is ——

Bal. No Blasphemy against that very Opera! —— I say, 'tis the Master-piece of Art, the Glory of its Author, the Delight of a whole Nation. It ravish'd the Nobility, Men, Women, and Children; inchanted the City; and stroll'd all over the Country. —— It makes me as eloquent as Mr. *Quibble* the Orator, and as valiant as Captain *Macheath,* or a prime Minister.

There is much mention of English and Italian opera and also plenty of banter about Gay's piece, which Ralph closely imitates in many points of style. On p. 35 Ballad says: "Oons! Mr. *Drama,* I don't like these *Merits,* and *Sprightlys,* and *Smooths,* and *Foibles,* they are not the proper Subjects of an Opera—I tell you, High-way-men and Whores, Beggars, and Rusticks are your only People; 'tis they raise the loud Laugh . . ."

The Female Parson, or Beau in the Suds. By Charles Coffey. Hay., 1730. Pub. May, 1730. Three acts and prologue; 28 songs.

[12] A Philadelphia schoolmaster, resident in England.

The Generous Free-Mason, or The Constant Lady. By W. R. Chetwood. B.F., 1730 (?); Hay., 1731. Sonneck puts first ed. in 1731, but publication was advertised in Dec., 1730. Three acts; 25 songs, 5 to B.O. airs. Several of the songs are specially set by Carey and Sheeles. This is called a tragi-comi-farcical ballad opera. A shortened version was acted in 1733 as *The Mock Mason.*

The Jealous Clown, or The Lucky Mistake. By Thomas Gataker. G.F., according to title-page. Pub. 1730. One act; 13 songs.

Patie and Peggy, or The Fair Foundling. By Theophilus Cibber. D.L., 1730. Pub. April, 1730. One act, prologue and epilogue; 22 songs, 4 to B.O. airs. This is called a Scotch ballad opera. In the Preface Cibber says he was induced to turn Ramsay's *The Gentle Shepherd* into a ballad opera. The dialogue is in heroic couplets.

The Pilot, a nautical opera. Anon. Acted 1730 (?).

The Prisoner's Opera. By Edward Ward. Sadler's Wells. Pub. 1730. The scene is a prison, with the payment of garnish, a dance by the prisoners, and so forth. The action consists of harlequinade. The dialogue is all in verse and is to be sung in operatic style. This piece is not in ballad opera form, but is included here on account of its title.

Robin Hood. Anon. Lee's and Harper's Booth, B.F. Pub. Aug., 1730. Three acts; 19 songs.

Silvia, or The Country Burial. By George Lillo. L.I.F., 1730. Sonneck lists an ed. dated 1731, but publication was advertised in Nov., 1730. Three acts; 63 songs. This was Lillo's first dramatic work. The *Biog. Dram.* says, "This was one of the pieces which the general vogue of these ballad operas, occasioned by the success of *The Beggar's Opera,* brought forth into the world."

1731

The Battle of the Poets, or The Contention of the Laurel. By Thomas Cooke (?). Hay., 1731. Pub. 1731. According to the title-page, this was "introduced as an entire new act to the comical tragedy of Tom Thumb."

Calista. Anon. Pub. April, 1731. Three acts and introduction; 39 songs, 12 to B.O. airs. The *Biog. Dram.* says this was apparently not intended for the stage, and was "built entirely on some scandalous reports of the times." *Fog's Weekly Journal,* March 27, 1731, however, says, "An excellent Dramatic Performance, after the Manner of the Beggar's Opera, call'd Calista, having been offered to some of the

Theatres, the Managers did not think fit to accept it, having been, as they said, forbid by Authority." An Introduction of Poet and Player leads up to the overture. At the end of Act I is a parting scene in imitation of the closing scene of Gay's first act. Count Hermio and Countess de Ulto sing a farewell duet of two stanzas and then the stage direction reads: "Exeunt, one at one Door, the other at t'other."

The Devil to Pay, or The Wives Metamorphosed. By Charles Coffey, D.L., 1731. Pub. 1732. One act and prologue; 16 songs, 1 to B.O. air. An operatic version of *The Devil of a Wife.*

The Fool's Opera, or The Taste of the Age. By Mat. Medley (Anthony Aston). Performed at Oxford. Pub. April, 1731. Seventeen songs. This is a plain take-off on the B.O. Many lines are closely parodied or are suggested. The following quotations will illustrate. In song ii:

> I'm touch'd to the Quick,
> With Rhetorick.
> Comparisons and Similies,
> Like the Fair Flower,
> In Covent-Garden Bower,
> That neither shrinks, rots, stinks or dies.

On p. 4: "Lady. Well, I know as well as the other fine Ladies of the Town, how to make the most of a Thing. —— A Woman (like a Cat) knows how to eat, tho' she has never been in a Cupboard." In song iv:

> What tho' my Mamma gave Advice,
> The Love of Nonsense make me Gay,
> My Heart with Sense as frozen as Ice,
> My Poet's Fire melts all away.

She languishes

> like a Lass on Greenland's Coast,
> Or Boys that for their Sparrow cry,
> Or Rat in a Trap, for Cheese that's toast.

There is also parody on several lines in the first two scenes of Act II of the B.O., and, in fragmentary style, on several later scenes and situations. Even the medley of Macheath and the reprieve are imitated. Throughout the piece the Lady and the Maid (Lucy) contend for the Poet in burlesque of Gay's characters and action. Once the Maid says: "Our Cases, dear Madam, are just the same, we are both too fond." In their duet occurs what may be a direct allusion to the author of the popular ballad opera:

A Curse on Love's Itch,
I think I'm bewitch'd,
So am I, for I die,
For the Gay Poetry.

The last song runs:

Thus I stand expecting Applause here;
Black, brown, and fair draw near;
. . . . . .
Let this Maxim your Mirth incline.
Take off your Bottle, and never be vext;
What pleases this Age will be burnt in the next.

At the end of the play is "A Ballad, Call'd, A Dissertation on the Beggar's Opera," in eight stanzas, dealing mainly with the rage over the B.O.[13]

The Highland Fair, or The Union of the Clans. By Joseph Mitchell. D.L., 1731. Pub. March, 1731. Three acts and introduction; 51 songs, 6 to B.O. airs. The frontispiece, by Hogarth, is entitled "A Scots Opera." The music, according to the title-page, "wholly consists of Select Scots Tunes." The Introduction of Critic and Poet comments on Scotch opera versus English, French, or Italian. It leads up to the overture in a way similar to that of the B.O. The *Grubstreet Journal,* December 31, 1730, quotes this announcement: "We hear that Mr. Rich designs very speedily to entertain the Town with a Scotch Opera, written by an ingenious Gentleman, now in Rehearsal: and, 'tis said, the principal characters will appear in Highland dresses." The editor adds, "A Welch Opera may be proper to succeed this." Fielding seems to have supplied the demand; see later entry.

The Jovial Crew. Attributed to E. Roome, M. Concanen, and Sir W. Yonge. D.L., 1731. Pub. 1731. Three acts; 53 songs, 3 to B.O. airs. The Preface says, "The Songs, (except about half a Dozen) were written about three Years ago." This would place them in 1728, when the B.O. had turned all attention upon ballad opera. Alteration of Brome's old play, which, with its setting and characters, could easily provide material for a real beggar's opera.

The Judgment of Paris, or The Triumph of Beauty. Anon. L.I.F., 1731. Pub. 1731. One act; 19 songs.

The Sailor's Opera, or A Trip to Jamaica. Anon. D.L., 1731. There is an ed. of 1745. Five acts; 27 songs.

[13] See *ante,* p. 20.

The Wanton Jesuit, or Innocence Seduced. Anon. Acted at Hay., according to the title-page, though the Preface says it was privately performed. Pub. 1731. Three acts, introduction and epilogue; 25 songs, 14 to B.O. airs, one of which is used twice. The Introduction of Poet and Player contains an argument about the appropriateness of the French opera to be presented.

The Welsh Opera, or The Grey Mare the Better Horse. By Henry Fielding. Hay., 1731. Pub. 1731 (?). Two acts and introduction; 30 songs, 8 to B.O. airs. The Introduction of Scriblerus and Player contains a discussion about opera. Scriblerus speaks of the "Smiles" (like Gay's "Similes") introduced into his piece. Variation of Fielding's *The Grubstreet Opera,* forbidden the stage, but pub. 1731 (three acts and introduction; 57 songs).

1732

The Devil of a Duke, or Trapolin's Vagaries. By Robert Drury. D.L., 1732. Pub. 1732. One act; 21 songs. Genest says this is a slight alteration of *Duke and no Duke.*

The Disappointment. By John Randal. Hay. Pub. 1732. One act; 12 songs, 4 to B.O. airs and 4 specially set by Warwell. The title-page says, "Alter'd from a Farce[14] after the Manner of the Beggar's Opera."

The Footman. Anon. In some early book-lists called *The Footman's Opera.* G.F., 1732. Pub. March, 1732. Three acts, introduction and epilogue; 68 songs, 5 to B.O. airs. The Introduction of Poet and Player discusses the probable success of the piece. The Poet says: "The Novelty of the Subject will indeed be the sole Cause of its Success, if it has any run: but I am afraid the ill Reception that all Imitations of that inimitable Opera of the Beggar have met with, will deter People from coming to see any more of that kind of Performance." There is also a reference to Macheath. The cue for the overture is similar to that of Gay. The piece contains general satire on the upper classes.

Humours of the Court, or Modern Gallantry. Anon. "As it was intended to have been perform'd." Pub. March, 1732. Three acts and introduction; 24 songs, 8 to B.O. airs. The Introduction is a dialogue between Poet and Player. One of the airs is named after Gay's words, "Through all the Employments of Life." One character is a Captain Modish, "a rakish Officer, with a good Assurance."

[14] Mrs. Centlivre's *A Wife well Managed.*

The Intriguing Courtiers, or The Modish Gallants. Anon. Never acted. Pub. 1732. Five acts; 9 songs, 6 to B.O. airs, in the interlude, *The Promis'd Marriage, or The Disappointed Lady.* The title-page speaks of the "variety of new songs, set to several English, Irish, and Scots ballad-tunes and country-dances." Sonneck lists an ed. with a slightly different title for the interlude; so does *Biog. Dram.* The interlude was separately published in 1733.

The Lottery. By Henry Fielding. D.L., 1732. Pub. 1732. One act, prologue and epilogue; 22 songs, 2 to B.O. airs. A good many of the songs are set by Seedo.

The Maggot. By Mrs. Egleton. Performed, for her benefit, at L.I.F., April 18, 1732. Genest says it does not seem to have been printed.

The Mock Doctor, or The Dumb Lady Cured. By Henry Fielding, after Molière. D.L., 1732. Pub. 1732. One act and epilogue; 9 songs, 3 to B.O. airs.

The Restauration of King Charles II, or The Life and Death of Oliver Cromwell. "A Historical Tragi-Comi-Ballad Opera." By Walter Aston. Genest says it was forbidden to be acted. Pub. May, 1732. Three acts; 23 songs.

A Sequel to the Opera of Flora. By the author of *Flora.* Sonneck assigns it outright to Cibber. L.I.F., 1732. Pub. 1732. Two acts; 15 songs, 1 to B.O. air. There is a tune called "South Sea Ballad," but it is not the same as Gay's. There is also a prison scene. At times the ideas and phrasing suggest the B.O.

Vanelia, or The Amours of the Great. By the author of *Lord Blunder's Confession.* Pub. 1732. Three acts and introduction; 21 songs, 14 to B.O. airs. One of these airs is named after Gay's words, "Through all the Employments of Life." This piece apparently was not intended for the stage, but written as a political satire. The title-page says, "By a Private Company near St. James's." The *Biog. Dram.* calls it "Court scandal." In the last speech of the Introduction of Player and Author the former says, "At least as there's no Politicks in't, it wo'n't be obnoxious."

1733

Achilles. By John Gay. C.G., 1733 (18 nights, according to *Biog. Dram.*). Pub. 1733. Three acts and prologue; 54 songs, 1 to B.O. air and 1 headed "Beggar's Opera Hornpipe." This play has little of the

brilliancy of the B.O. The *Gentleman's Magazine,* February, 1733, p. 78, quoting the *Daily Courant,* February 16, says: "The Songs are so far from equalling the Beggar's Opera, that had they not been made publick under Mr. Gay's Name they might have pas'd for the Productions of some of those dull Imitators he ridicules in the Prologue." Colman's adaptation of Gay's opera was performed at C.G. in 1774, as *Achilles in Petticoats,* with new music by Dr. Arne.

The Boarding-School, or The Sham Captain. By Charles Coffey. D.L., 1733. Pub. Jan., 1733. One act; 23 songs, 3 to B.O. airs. A coarse piece founded on D'Urfey's *Love for Money, or The Boarding-School.*

The Commodity Excis'd, or The Women in an Uproar. "A new ballad opera. As it will be privately acted, in the secret apartments of vintners and tobacconists." By Timothy Smoke. Pub. April, 1733. Three acts and introduction. Evidently not intended for the stage.

The Court Legacy. By Mary Manley. "As acted at the Eutopian Palace." Pub. Nov., 1733. Three acts and introduction; 43 airs. A court satire. *Biog. Dram.:* "This obscene piece was never acted."

The Court Medley, or Marriage by Proxy. "A new Court ballad opera." Anon. Pub. August, 1733. Three acts; 30 songs. Sonneck lists a slightly altered version of this piece, published as *The Fortunate Prince: or, Marriage at Last,* 1734, with 33 songs. A piece by this name, however, was advertised as early as November, 1733. The 1734 edition examined for this account shows only 30 songs, as in the original version, 9 to B.O. airs. One air is named after Gay's words, "'Tis Woman that seduces all Mankind."

The Decoy. By H. Potter. G.F. Pub. March, 1733. Three acts; 52 songs, 1 to B.O. air. There are several suggestions of B.O. imitation. One is found in a parting scene, similar to that of Polly and Macheath, featuring Squire Spendthrift and Jenny Ogle. This leads up to the song which begins:

> Must I then leave thee,
> My charming Jenny?
> Oh! 'tis Death to me
> That we must Part.

One scene is in Bridewell prison. There are three women of the town, named Mrs. Frisk, Mrs. Stroaker, and Mrs. Feelmore. Other female characters are Sukey Slattern, Diana, and Betty. One of the men is named Lookout. In the dedicatory letter "To the Right Honourable Charles Earl of Tankerville," the author says: "My Lord, When I

consider the Countenance your Lordship shew'd to the celebrated *Beggar's Opera,* I cannot but rejoice at my good Fortune to have this small Piece of mine (so much inferior to that) reciev'd by so judicious a *Patron.*" This writer, like the other lesser ballad opera makers, was either awed by the success of Gay's piece, or merely pretending modesty, for the sake of diplomacy.

The Downfall of Bribery, or The honest men of Taunton. By Mark Freeman, Freeholder and Grocer. As performed at an inn in Taunton, Somersetshire. Pub. Dec., 1733. Three acts and ballad epilogue; 16 songs.

The Fancy'd Queen. By Robert Drury. C.G., 1733. Pub. Aug., 1733. One act and prologue; 25 songs.

The Honest Electors. Inner title, *The Honest Freeholders.* Anon. Pub. 1733. Three acts and introduction; 28 songs, 4 apparently to B.O. airs, though no music is printed. The Introduction, in which two citizens discuss the new opera, "The Freeholder's Opera," closes, "Pray walk in, I hear the Overture a playing." The *Biog. Dram.* lists as a ballad opera of 1733 *The Honest Electors, or The Courtiers sent back with their Bribes.* Apparently *The Honest Electors, or The Freeholder's Opera,* pub. May, 1734, was a revision of one of these editions.

The Jew Decoy'd, or The Progress of a Harlot. Anon. Not acted. Pub. Feb., 1733. Three acts and introduction; 17 songs. Founded on Hogarth's picture.

The Livery Rake and Country Lass. By Edward Phillips. Hay., 1733. Pub. Oct., 1733. One act; 18 songs, 3 to B.O. airs. There is some ridicule on Italian opera, in one song and the dialogue connected with it. After the song the characters drink to the success of English drama.

Lord Blunder's Confession, or Guilt Makes a Coward. By the author of *Vanelia.* Not acted. Pub. May, 1733. Three acts; 21 airs.

The Mad Captain. By Robert Drury. G.F., 1733. Pub. March, 1733. One act; 30 songs, 2 to B.O. airs.

The Mock Lawyer. By Edward Phillips. C.G., 1733. Pub. Oct., 1733. One act; 22 songs, 4 to B.O. airs. One of the songs, "'Tis Woman that seduces," is a sort of adaptation of Gay's words.

The Oxford Act. Anon. The title-page says, "As it was Perform'd By a Company of Students at Oxford." Pub. Aug., 1733. Three acts; 37 songs, 14 to B.O. airs. The *Biog. Dram.* says it "was occasioned by the act then held at Oxford." There are lines and situations simi-

lar to some in the B.O. The opening "Scene discovers the Vice-Chancellor and one of the Proctors at a Table, with a Bottle of Wine and Glasses before them." Their talk is suggestive of some of Gay's speeches. Pedant and Haughty say "Brother" to each other, and in several more ways remind one of Peachum and Lockit. That the writer is thinking of Gay is shown by two lines in song xii:

> Then as Johnny Gay says, *Let's dry up our Sorrow,*
> *The Wretch of to-day may be happy to-morrow.*

The Rape of Helen. "A mock opera." By John Breval. C.G., 1733. Pub. June, 1737. One act; 25 songs, 2 to B.O. airs. The last song is set to Dr. Pepusch's "Minuet in Arestes."

Rome Excised. "A Tragi-comi-Ballad Opera." Anon. Pub. 1733. Three acts; 18 songs. A political attack, not intended for the stage.

The Stage Mutineers, or A Playhouse to be Let. "By a Gentleman late of Trinity-College, Cambridge." C.G., 1733. Pub. Aug., 1733. One act, prologue and epilogue; 16 songs, 3 to B.O. airs. A burlesque on the dispute between manager and actors at D.L. Called a tragi-comi-farcical ballad opera.

The State Juggler, or Sir Politick Ribband. "A new excise opera." Anon. Pub. 1733. Three acts; 21 songs. Evidently not intended for the stage.

The Sturdy Beggars. Anon. Pub. Aug., 1733. Three acts; 29 songs, 13 to B.O. airs. A political satire, apparently not intended for the stage. The *Biog. Dram.* says it was written on the occasion of the Excise Bill. There is mention of bribery and money; also of Jack Sheppard and Jonathan Wild. One character, a rogue, is named Locket. In a tavern scene, Thickhead and Numscul, with a bottle of wine before them, talk like Peachum and Lockit about their important business. They quarrel, draw their swords, are pacified, sheathe their weapons, and shake hands.

The Wanton Countess, or Ten Thousand Pounds for a Pregnancy. Anon. Pub. Feb., 1733. Three acts and introduction; 22 songs, 11 to B.O. airs. The *Biog. Dram.* says it was not intended for the stage, but written for the propagation of court scandal. The title-page says, "Founded on true Secret History." In the Introduction of Author and Player the latter remarks, "I hate this Sing-song way of writing!"

Wat Tyler, or The State Menders. "A new Tragi-Comi-Farcical Ballad Opera." Anon. D.L., 1733.

1734

Don Quixote in England. By Henry Fielding. Hay., 1734. Pub. 1734. Three acts and introduction; 15 songs, 3 to B.O. airs. The Introduction is a dialogue between Manager and Author. Begun at Leyden, according to Fielding, in 1728, which was the year of the B.O.

The Intriguing Chambermaid. By Henry Fielding. D.L., 1734. Pub. 1734. Two acts, prologue and epilogue; 12 songs, 1 to B.O. air. From the French of Regnard.

The Keepers. Written "by a student at the University." Pub. Feb., 1734.

The Wedding, or The Country House-Wife. Anon. The *Biog. Dram.* says not acted. Pub. April, 1734. Three acts; 30 songs, 15 apparently to B.O. airs, though no music is printed. Some of the songs seem to reflect the influence of Gay's piece. For instance, the one to "Lumps of Pudding" begins, "Like Culprit dejected, I my Sentence attend." There are often similar figures in song-lines. Jests on marriage are made.

The Whim, or The Miser's Retreat. Anon. From the French. G.F. Pub. 1734. One act; 13 songs, 1 to B.O. air.

1735

A Cure for a Scold. By J. Worsdale, Portrait-Painter. D.L., 1735. Two acts and epilogue; 23 songs, 7 to B.O. airs. Founded on *The Taming of the Shrew.*

Macheath in the Shades, or Bayes at Parnassus. Anon. For a full account of this piece see *ante,* pp. 52 and 241.

The Merry Cobler, or The Second Part of The Devil to Pay. By Charles Coffey. D.L., 1735. Pub. 1735. One act; 17 songs, 1 to B.O. air. There is some talk about Ministers of State. Dedicated to Lady Walpole.

An Old Man Taught Wisdom, or The Virgin Unmask'd. By Henry Fielding. D.L., 1735. Pub. 1735. One act; 12 songs, 4 to B.O. airs. There is talk on marriage similar to Gay's. Later known almost entirely by the subtitle.

The Plot, or Pill and Drop. By John Kelly (?). D.L., 1735. Pub. 1735. One act, prologue and epilogue; 10 songs, 3 to B.O. airs.

Politicks on both Sides. Anon. L.I.F., 1735. Genest says unprinted.

The Rival Milliners, or The Humours of Covent Garden. By

Robert Drury. Hay., 1735. Pub. 1735. Two acts; 26 songs, 3 to B.O. airs.

Trick for Trick. By R. Fabian. D.L., 1735. Pub. 1735. Two acts; 10 songs, 1 to B.O. air.

The Wonder! an Honest Yorkshire Man. By Henry Carey. L.I.F., 1735. Pub. 1736. Also advertised, as published, in Dec., 1735. One act, prologue and two epilogues; 19 songs, 2 to B.O. airs. Several of the songs are set to music by Carey himself. Sonneck lists an ed. of 1736 as *The Honest Yorkshireman,* with 21 songs. The piece was acted under this title at Hay. and G.F., 1735.

1736

The Beggar's Pantomime, or The Contending Columbines. By Woodward. For a full account of this piece see *ante,* pp. 59 ff.

Chuck, or The School Boy's Opera. Pub. 1736. The *Biog. Dram.* says, "This piece is extremely puerile; yet the author or editor has thought proper to put Mr. Cibber's name to it."

The Female Rake, or Modern Fine Lady. By Joseph Dorman (?). Hay. Pub. May, 1736. Two acts, two prologues and epilogue; 16 songs, 3 to B.O. airs. Reprinted in 1739 as *The Woman of Taste, or The Yorkshire Lady.*

The Happy Lovers, or The Beau Metamorphosed. By Henry Ward. L.I.F., 1736. Pub. April, 1736. One act; 14 songs, 4 to B.O. airs.

The Lover his own Rival. By Abraham Langford. G.F., 1736. Pub. March, 1736. One act, prologue and epilogue; 17 songs, 4 to B.O. airs. The last song is to "Lumps of Pudding," Gay's closing air. The musical epilogue uses again one of the B.O. tunes. The *Biog. Dram.* says, "One of the wretched performances in imitation of *The Beggar's Opera,* and produced by the success of that piece." There is a musical prologue which begins,

> As Operas now are so much in the Mode,
> So much in the Mode, so much in the Mode,
> And a Song's as well lik'd as a Laureat's Ode,
> Give ear to my Ditty, I pray!

There is general satire, as in the B.O., and some of the songs use similar ideas and phrasing.

The Royal Marriage. Anon. Unacted, according to Genest, who calls it "better than the generality." Pub. 1736. Three acts.

Tumble-down Dick, or Phaeton in the Suds. By Henry Fielding. Hay., 1736. Pub. 1737. There are 5 songs, 2 to B.O. airs.

1737

The Lucky Discovery, or The Tanner of York. By J. Arthur. Acted at York, 1737; C.G., 1738. Sonneck lists an ed. of 1737 pub. at York, with 9 songs. The London ed. of 1738 (advertised in May) contains 11 songs, 2 to B.O. airs. One act.

The Mad-house. "A rehearsal of a new ballad-opera burlesq'd." By Robert Baker. L.I.F., 1737. Pub. 1737. Two acts, introduction, prologue and epilogue; 18 songs. See *post,* Appendix section III, note to p. 59.

1738

The Disappointed Gallant, or Buckram in Armour. By Adam Thomson. Acted at the New Theatre, Edinburgh. Pub. at Edinburgh, 1738.

1739

Britons, Strike Home, or The Sailor's Rehearsal. By Edward Phillips. D.L., 1739. Pub. 1739. One act, prologue and epilogue; 8 songs, 1 to B.O. air, "Britons strike home." This piece contains some satire on Italian opera, and a rehearsal scene with the author commenting on his own work. There is an allusion to Gay's *The What d'ye Call It.*

Don Sancho, or The Student's Whim. By Elizabeth Boyd. Apparently not acted. Pub. 1739. Two acts, prologue, epilogue, and masque; 12 songs.

The Shepherd's Opera. The *Biog. Dram.* suggests John Maxwell as the author. Pub. at York, 1739.

1740

The False Guardians Outwitted. Genest says it was written by W. G. Poor; the *Biog. Dram.,* by William Goodall. Never acted. Pub. 1740.

The Operator. Anon. Pub. Feb., 1740. One act; 10 songs, but no titles of airs are given. Advertised in *London Magazine,* Feb., 1740 (monthly catalogue of books), as "after the Manner of the Beggar's Opera." There is a scene with the Oculist and three women of the town. The chief topic of discussion is women. Intended, according to *Biog. Dram.,* to satirize Dr. Taylor, the oculist.

The Preceptor, or The Loves of Abelard and Heloise. Described in *Biog. Dram.* as a ballad opera of one act, by William Hammond. Acted at Smock Alley, Dublin. Pub. 1740.

The Raree Show, or The Fox Trap't. By Joseph Peterson. Acted at York, 1739. A second ed. pub. at Chester, 1740. Two acts, prologue and two epilogues.

1742

Love at First Sight, or The Wit of a Woman. By Joseph Yarrow. Pub. at York, 1742. Two acts, prologue and epilogue; 21 songs. The *Biog. Dram.* says, "This little piece was never acted any where but in the York company of comedians, in which the author was a performer at the time of its publication."

Miss Lucy in Town. Sequel to *The Virgin Unmask'd.* By Henry Fielding. D.L., 1742. Pub. 1742. One act; 8 songs.

Sancho at Court, or The Mock Governour. By James Ayres (?). Never acted. Pub. 1742. Three acts; 20 songs.

1743

Court and Country, or The Changelings. Anon. Pub. Jan, 1743. Three acts and prologue; 42 songs, 11 to B.O. airs. Three of these airs are named after Gay's words: "The Modes of the Court," "Let us take the Road," and "The Charge is prepar'd." The *Biog. Dram.* says not intended for the stage, but written as a satire. The title-page says "As it was lately performed," but Genest says not acted. In several ways the B.O. is suggested. Act I opens with "Lord Fordall discovered at a Table with a large Sum of Money before him." On p. 9, Lord Fordall says, "I have made a List of some of my Partizans, in Imitation of my worthy Predecessor Mr. *Peach'em,* which we'll examine together in my Closet." Song xxi begins, "When Love subdues the Virgin's Heart." In Act II Lord Fordall has a conversation with Polly about her lover. Song xxvii is a parody on one of Gay's. It begins:

> The Indictment's prepar'd, my Jury is found,
> For Justice they cry—a terrible Sound.
> I go without Fear, secure of my Life,
> And laugh at their Folly and impotent Strife.

Song xxviii shows that again the author had the B.O. very much in mind:

Were Crimes to be punish'd as they shou'd be,
Not one in Ten thousand wou'd 'scape scot-free;
The Thief and his J---ge might keep Company
Upon Tyburn Tree.
Who robs for Want, to Justice they bring;
But He grows Great, who robs for *******.[15]
This gains a blue R——n, and that a String
Upon Tyburn Tree.

1749

Jack the Gyant Queller. By Henry Brooke. Acted once in Dublin, 1749, according to Genest, and then prohibited because of satire in some of the songs against bad governors. Altered and performed again in Dublin, 1754. Pub. as *Little John and the Giants,* no date; this ed., probably printed in Dublin, apparently belongs in or after 1754. Five acts and prologue; 51 songs. The songs were also pub. separately, April, 1749. The *Biog. Dram.* says that *Galligantus,* pub. 1758, after being acted at Hay. and D.L., was taken from this opera by Brooke.

1755

The Country Coquet, or Miss in her Breeches. A "Female Opera," according to the dedication. By "A Young Lady." The title-page says "As it may be acted at Drury Lane." Pub. 1755. There are 17 songs, 1 to B.O. air, which is named after Gay's words, "If you at an Office solicit your Due." The piece is a weak one, with general satire on society.

In the foregoing list certain mere broadside or pamphlet parodies on *The Beggar's Opera,* or any ballad opera, have not been included. Although these in name or form carry on the tradition of the original work, giving ample proof that Gay's big success of 1728 was the sensation of the time and for many years after, they do not influence the development of the type, because they are not plays at all. I refer to such works as *Polly Peachum's Opera* and *The Ladies' Opera,* mentioned early in this volume, and *Excise, a new Ballad Opera,* a small print satirizing the Walpole administration. The Bodleian Library contains an interesting early document, undated, called

[15] Meant for "the King"?

"Begging Prologue to *Gretna Green;* A New Musical Entertainment; Being a Musical Medley, from the Songs in the Beggar's Opera. *Sung with universal Applause, by Mr. Wilson, at the Theatre-Royal, Hay-Market.*" This is a broadside sheet, containing a nonsensical mixture of parody stuff full of suggestions of *The Beggar's Opera.* Twenty-one airs from Gay's piece are used. The extreme end of ballad opera adaptation is found in "An Operatical Epistle to a Friend in the Country," *London Magazine,* January, 1734. This develops a musical letter by reference to two of Gay's tunes for an overture, and by a number of songs, four of which are from *The Beggar's Opera.*

II

BALLAD ORIGINALS

THE original words to the airs named by Gay naturally have interest for the student of *The Beggar's Opera.* For that reason, the location of every piece, in the form to which the dramatist makes reference in the titles set down as headings to his own songs, has been attempted. Sometimes the verses have been discovered without any connection with the music, and sometimes the air alone has been traced, no words having been found to illustrate it; in only one case has no information been obtained.

The chief concern here is with the original song words to the tunes selected, rather than with the tunes themselves, which occur over and over with different lyrics and ballads. In quotation from these original verses, however, one or two stanzas will be sufficient to point a comparison. In every case enough of the former piece is given to show any adaptation for *The Beggar's Opera;* most of the quotations are, in fact, proportionate with Gay's lines to the same air.

It seems evident that Gay went especially to two collections for musical suggestions, D'Urfey's *Pills to purge Melancholy* and the *Dancing Master,* in their several editions. For the Scotch airs he probably had access to various collections, including William Thomson's *Orpheus Caledonius,* 1725, and Ramsay's compilations, ranging from 1724 to 1727.

A good deal of attention has been given to the music of *The Beggar's Opera,* not as such, but as music of English balladry. Chief among the workers in this respect is William Chappell, who lists most of the airs.[1] Many of the songs in *The Beggar's Opera* are used by him to illustrate the airs in general. Two recent writers on Gay who are interested in the sources of the ballads back of *The Beggar's Opera* are Macleod (edition of 1905) and Calmus (edition of 1912). Their accounts, however, are incomplete and often not based on thorough research among early materials.

The comments in the following song-list are mainly in fragmentary note form. The airs are arranged in order by acts, as in the first edition. In the case of each entry, where information has been available, the following scheme of presentation has, in general, been employed: (1) the original song words, quoted in part; (2) early collections containing the same words or air;[2] (3) other names or versions (often only selections from many) of the same air.[3]

ACT I

Air I. An old Woman cloathed in Gray.

(Through all the Employments of Life.)

In a miscellaneous collection of *English Songs* in the B.M. (catalogue date, 1705?), this piece is included, in sheet form. The first stanza begins:

> An old Woman Cloathed in Grey,
> Whose Daughter was charming and young,
> But Chanc'd to be once led astray,
> By Rogers false flattering Tongue.
> With whom she too often had been,
> Abroad in the meadows and Fields.

[1] *Popular Music* and *National English Airs.*

[2] Exact verbal similarity is not always to be implied. There are often slight changes in wording, though the song remains substantially the same.

[3] Special abbreviations for this list are: *Pills,* for D'Urfey's *Pills to purge Melancholy; Tea-Table,* for Ramsay's *Tea-Table Miscellany; New Misc.,* for Ramsay's *New Miscellany; Vocal Misc.,* for *Vocal Miscellany;* Watts, for Watt's *Musical Miscellany; Roxburghe,* for *Roxburghe Ballads* in B.M.; *Comp. Coll.,* for *Complete Collection of Old and New English and Scotch Songs; Glasgow Coll.,* for *Choice Collection,* Glasgow; *Chearful Comp.,* for *Chearful Companion; Jovial Comp.,* for *Jovial Companion; Merry Comp.,* for *Merry Companion; Anc. and Mod. Scots Songs,* for *Ancient and Modern Scots Songs.*

Chappell says a variant of this tune was called "Let Oliver now be forgotten." Another name for it was "Unconstant Roger." The words given above were also used to this air under the title of "Kind husband and imperious wife." The music was printed as early as 1665.

Air II. The bonny grey-ey'd Morn.

('Tis Woman that seduces all Mankind.)

In a B.M. volume, "A Collection of the Choicest Songs and Dialogues" (catalogue date, 1698?), is a sheet music piece entitled "A Scotch Song in the (Fond Husband)[4] Set by Mr. Jere: Clarke,[5] Sung by Mrs. Willis." The first stanza:

The Bonny grey Ey'd Morn began to peep,
When Jockey rowz'd with Love came blithly on,
And I who wishing lay depriv'd of sleep,
Abhorr'd the lazy Hours that slow did run;
But muckle were my joys when in my view,
I from my window spy'd my only dear,
I took the wings of Love and to him flew,
For I had fancy'd all my heav'n was there.

The air only is given in *Dancing Master,* ed. 2, 1698. The words appear in *Pills,* 1699; *Vocal Misc.,* 1734; *Orpheus* (*Robin*), 1749. In Allan Ramsay's *The Gentle Shepherd* there is an adaptation of this song.

Air III. Cold and Raw.

(If any Wench Venus's Girdle wear.)

In *Roxburghe* II, as "The Scotchman outwitted by the Farmer's Daughter." The words are by D'Urfey. The first stanza:

Cold and raw the North did blow,
Bleak in the Morning early;
All the Trees were hid with Snow,
Cover'd with Winters yearly:
As I was riding o'er the Slough,
I met with a Farmer's Daughter;
Rosie Cheeks, and bonny Brow,
Geud Faith made my mouth to water.

[4] By D'Urfey.

[5] According to Cooke (*Memoirs of Macklin,* p. 52), Jeremiah Clarke was "the original composer of Dryden's celebrated Ode on St. Cecilia's Birthday." He was organist at the Chapel Royal and a composer of sacred music.

Also in *Pills,* 1700; *Vocal Misc.,* 1734; *Nightingale,* 1738; *Merry Comp.,* 1742; *Orpheus* (*Linnet*) 1749.

George Hogarth (*British Song*) says the tune is known in Scotland as "Up in the morning early," from John Hamilton's words to an English air. He says that it has been reputed to be Scotch, but that D'Urfey's words, published as a Scotch song, are responsible for this idea. He cites its early appearance in the *English Dancing Master,* and in Hilton's *Collection of Catches,* 1652. In the *Dancing Master,* various editions, it is given as "Stingo, or Oyle of Barley," and later as "Cold and Raw." Hawkins (*History of Music*) says it is supposed to be of great antiquity.

Air IV. Why is your faithful Slave disdain'd?

(If Love the Virgin's Heart invade.)

In *Banquet of Musick,* Book II, 1688, these words are given, with the air (two out of four stanzas):

Why is your faithful Slave disdain'd?
By gentle Arts my Heart you gain'd!
  Oh, keep it by the same!
For ever shall my Passion last,
If you will make me once possest,
  Of what I dare not name.

Though charming are your Wit and Face,
'Tis not alone to hear and gaze,
  That will suffice my Flame;
Love's Infancy on hopes may live,
But you to mine full grown must give,
  Of what I dare not name.

Also in B.M. collection of *English Ballads,* 1790, Vol. IV, though it is a slightly different version. Also in *Pills,* 1699; *Vocal Misc.,* 1734; *Lark,* 1740; *Orpheus* (*Robin*), 1749. The music is by Bononcini.

The popularity of *The Beggar's Opera* is shown in the writing of songs to this tune, as a *Beggar's Opera* tune, called "If Love the Virgin's Heart invade." For instance, in *Vocal Misc.,* 1734, "When *Daphne* o'er the Meadows fled." In the same collection the original lyric is printed under the tune of "If Love the Virgin's Heart betray'd."

Air V. Of all the simple Things we do.

(A Maid is like the golden Oar.)

In *Pills,* 1719, is "The Mouse Trap. Made to a comical Tune in the Country Wake."[6] The words are by D'Urfey.

Of all the simple things we do,
To rub over a Whimsical Life;
There's no one Folly is so true,
As that very bad Bargain a Wife;
We're just like a Mouse in a Trap,
Or Vermin caught in a Gin;
We Sweat and Fret, and try to Escape,
And Curse the sad Hour we came in.

Also in *Hive,* 1726; Watts, 1731, entitled "Marriage"; *Comp. Coll.,* 1735; *Merry Comp.,* 1742; *Goldfinch,* 1748; *Orpheus (Thrush),* 1749. The tune only is in early editions of *Dancing Master.*

Air VI. What shall I do to show how much I love her.

(Virgins are like the fair Flower in its Lustre.)

In *Pills,* 1700, as "A Song." The first stanza:

What shall I do to shew how much I love her,
How many Millions of Sighs can suffice;
That which wins other Hearts ne'er can move her,
Those common methods of Love she'll despise:
I will love more than Man e'er Lov'd before me,
Gaze on her all day, and melt all the night,
Till for her own sake at last she'll implore me,
To Love her less to preserve our delight.

Also in *Hive,* 1725; *Comp. Coll.,* 1735; *Merry Comp.,* 1742; *Goldfinch,* 1748.

Both the music, composed by Purcell in 1690, and the words are from the opera of *Dioclesian, or The Prophetess,* altered by Betterton from Beaumont and Fletcher. Burney (*History of Music,* III, 500) says that this air "after it had done its duty to these words upwards of thirty years, became the favourite tune in the *Beggar's Opera,* from its first performance, in 1727 [1728], to the present time."

[6] By Doggett. Printed in 1696.

Air VII. Oh London is a fine Town.

(Our Polly is a sad Slut!)

In *Pills,* 1700. The first lines:

> Oh, *London* is a fine Town, and a gallant City,
> 'Tis Govern'd by the Scarlet Gown, come listen to my Ditty.
> This City has a Mayor, this Mayor is a Lord,
> He Governeth the Citizens upon his own accord.
> He boasteth his Gentility, and how Nobly he was born,
> His Arms are three *Ox-heads,* and his crest a *rampant Horn.*

Also in *Vocal Misc.,* 1734; *Comp. Coll.,* 1735; *Orpheus* (*Thrush*), 1749. The B.M. collection of *English Songs,* Vol. V, has this piece in sheet music form, as "The London Ditty." There is an early version, "London is a fine Town, and a brave City," in the collection at the end of *Le Prince d'Amour,* 1660.

"The Pope's Pedagree," a *Roxburghe* ballad, is written "To a pleasant new Tune, Or, London is a brave Town." "Peggy Ramsey," or "Peg-a-Ramsey," is another name for this air, which was used with many popular songs in the eighteenth century.

Air VIII. Grim King of the Ghosts.

(Can Love be controul'd by Advice?)

In *Roxburghe* II is "The Lunatick Lover: Or, The Young Man's Call to Grim King of the Ghosts for Cure. To an Excellent New Tune." The first stanza:

> Grim King of the Ghosts, make hast,
> And bring hither all your Train;
> See how the pale Moon do's wast!
> And just now is in the Wain:
> Come you Night-Hags, with your Charms,
> And Revelling Witches away,
> And hug me close in your Arms,
> To you my Respects I'll pay.

Also in *Bagford Ballads* (B.M.); *Pills,* 1720; *Hive,* 1727; *Vocal Misc.,* 1734; *Goldfinch,* 1748; *Orpheus* (*Linnet*), 1749. Percy includes it with other "mad songs."

Gay took his first line from a song by Berkeley, "The Modest Question" (in *Old English Songs,* B.M. collection, 1700). The piece begins:

Can love be controul'd by Advice,
Can Madness and Reason agree;
O Molly who'd ever be wise,
If Madness is loving of Thee.

Nicholas Rowe's song, "Despairing beside a clear stream," was written to this tune. In Walsh and Hare's edition of the music of *The Beggar's Opera* (B.M. date, 1732) the air is named after Rowe's words.

Air IX. O Jenny, O Jenny, where hast thou been.

(O Polly, you might have toy'd and kist.)

In *Pills*, 1719, is "The Willoughby Whim. A Scotch Song.[7] In a Dialogue between two Sisters." The words are by D'Urfey. The opening lines:

Molly. Oh *Jenny, Jenny,* where hast thou been?
Father and Mother are seeking for thee,
You have been ranting, playing the Wanton,
Keeping of *Jockey* Company.
Jenny. Oh *Molly,* I've been to hear [the] Mill clack,
And grind Grist for the Family,
Full as it went I've brought home my Sack,
For the Miller has tooken his Toll of me.

Also in *Tea-Table*, 1724; *New Misc.*, 1727; *Comp. Coll.*, 1735; *Nightingale*, 1738; *Orpheus* (*Thrush*), 1749; *Charmer*, 1752; *Glasgow Coll.*, 1764; *Anc. and Mod. Scots Songs*, 1769.

In *Vocal Misc.*, 1734, the song is given as set to the air of "Oh! Polly, oh! Polly, where have you been?" Gay's first line is not like that, but the influence is plainly seen. The tune, an old one, was sometimes called "May Fair." It survives to-day as the air to the familiar child's song, "Golden slumbers kiss your eyes."

Air X. Thomas, I cannot.

(I, like a Ship in Storms, was tost.)

The nearest thing I have found in the way of proper words for this tune is a song printed in *Vocal Misc.*, 1734, and also in *Nightingale*, 1738. The first stanza:[8]

[7] In name and subject only.

[8] Chappell mentions a song beginning thus as being in *Grammatical Drollery*, by W. H. (Captain Hicks), 1682.

Come, come, my *Molly*, come let us be jolly,
Since we are here met together;
My Mother's from Home, and we are alone,
Come let us be merry together;
I'll give you Rings, and Bracelets fine,
And other fine Trinkets, if you'll be mine.
O no, kind Sir, I dare not incline.
My Mother she tells me I munnot, I munnot,
My Mother she tells me I munnot.

In *Dancing Master,* 1670, the air is called "Thomas you cannot." In *Dancing Master,* 1686 (B.M. copy), is a piece labeled "Paul's Steeple," but marked in a manuscript note (by William Chappell) "Thomas, you cannot." In *Dancing Master,* 1728, is the same air, as "*Tumas,* I cannot: Or, Tom Trusty." Also called "Sir Thomas, I cannot."

Air XI. A Soldier and a Sailor.

(A Fox may steal your Hens, Sir.)

In *Pills,* 1699. The first stanza:

A Soldier and a Sailer, a Tinker and a Tailour,
Had once a doubtful strife Sir
To make a maid a Wife Sir,
Whose name was buxome *Jone,*
Whose name was buxome Joan,
For now the time was ended,
When She no more Intended
To lick her lips at Men Sir,
And gnaw the Sheets in vain Sir,
And lie o' Nights a lone,
And lie o' Nights a lone.

In *Osterley Park Ballads* (B.M.) this song is given under the title "Buxom Joan of Lymas's Love to a jolly Sailer: Or, The Maiden's Choice." It is to be sung "To an excellent new Play-house Tune." John Eccles was the composer of the music, for the song "A soldier and a sailor," sung by Ben Sampson in Act III, Sc. iv, of Congreve's *Love for Love,* first performed in 1695.

Also in B.M. collection of *English Songs* as a sheet music piece (catalogue date, 1700?), "A Soldier and a Sailor Sung by Mr. Doggett at the Theatre"; *Vocal Misc.,* 1734; *Comp. Coll.,* 1735; *Merry Comp.,* 1742; *Orpheus* (*Linnet*), 1749. Air only in *Dancing Master,* 1696; and 1703, as "The Soldier and the Sailer."

Air XII. Now ponder well, ye Parents dear.

(Oh, ponder well! be not severe.)

Chappell lists this ballad as "The Children in the Wood," and "The Norfolk Gentleman, his Will and Testament." The first stanza:

Now ponder well, You parents dear,
These words which I shall write;
A doleful story you shall hear,
In time brought forth to light.

In the *Spectator* (No. 85) Addison discusses "the old Ballad of the *Two Children in the Wood,* which is one of the Darling Songs of the Common People, and has been the Delight of most *Englishmen* in some Part of their Age." Ritson says it was entered on the Stationers' books in 1595. The air is sometimes called "Chevy Chase" and "Rogero."

Air XIII. Le printemps rappelle aux armes.

(The Turtle thus with plaintive crying.)

In *Pills,* 1719. The first stanza, with the original translation:

Chanson en Francois[9]

Le printems, r'apelle aux armes, Couller mes larmes;
Le printems, r'apelle aux armes, ah quel tourment,
Grand Dieu parmis, tant d'allarmes, epargnezmon,
Cher amant bis.

Translated from the French:

Spring invites, the Troops are going, let Tears be flowing,
Spring invites, the Troops are going, ah cruel smart,
Midst alarming, dreadful harming,
Spare him Fate, who charms my Heart.

In Walsh and Hare's musical edition (1732) this tune is called "Hark! the Trumpet Sounds to Arms."

Air XIV. Pretty Parrot, say.

(Pretty Polly, say.)

In *Pills,* 1709, this piece is listed as "A New Song Translated from the French." The first stanza:

[9] The French words are copied here without corrections.

Pretty Parret, say when I was away,
And in dull Absence pass'd the day
What at home was doing?
With Chat and Play,
We are Gay,
Night and Day,
Good Chear and Mirth renewing;
Singing, Laughing all, Singing Laughing all, like pretty, pretty Poll.

In a B.M. collection of *Songs* it is found in sheet form (catalogue date, 1705?), as "Pretty Poll, a Pleasant Dialogue between a Parret and his Master. Set by Mr. Freeman."[10]

Also in *Tea-Table,* 1724; *Hive,* 1727; *Merry Comp.,* 1742; *Goldfinch,* 1748; *Orpheus* (*Robin*), 1749. In *Dancing Master,* 1728, this air is given as "Pretty Poll."

The editor of *Illustrated English Songs* (1851, etc.) seems to take this work as later than it really is: "This lively and singular piece was probably popular at the time of writing the Beggar's Opera, which has a duet to the same measure."

Air XV. Pray, Fair One, be kind.

(My Heart was so free.)

A B.M. collection of *Songs* contains a sheet version of this piece: "A Song Set by Mr. Leveridge Sung by Mr. Wilks in the Comedy call'd the Recruiting-Officer." The first stanza:

Come Fair one be kind, you never shall find,
A Fellow so fit for a Lover,
Come Fair one be kind, you never shall find,
A Fellow so fit for a Lover,
The World shall view, my Passion for you,
The World shall view, my Passion for you,
But never your Passion discover.

Also in *Pills,* 1709; *Hive,* 1726; *Goldfinch,* 1748; *Orpheus* (*Linnet*), 1749.

Air XVI. Over the Hills and far away.

(Were I laid on Greenland's Coast.)

In *Pills,* 1709, as "Jockey's Lamentation." The first stanza and chorus:

[10] This was parodied in a dialogue between the English and Paris *Gazettes.*

Jockey met with *Jenny* fair
Betwixt the Dawning and the Day,
But *Jockey* now is full of Care,
For *Jenny* stole my Heart away:
Altho' she promis'd to be true,
Yet she alas, has prov'd unkind,
That which do make poor *Jockey* rue,
For *Jenny* fickle as the Wind:
And, 'Tis o'er the Hills and far away,
'Tis o'er the Hills, and far away,
'Tis o'er the Hills, and far away,
The Wind has blow'd my Plaid away.

Also in *New Misc.*, 1727; *Vocal Misc.*, 1734; *Comp. Coll.*, 1735; *Nightingale*, 1738; *Merry Comp.*, 1742; *Glasgow Coll.*, 1764. In *Dancing Master*, 1728, the air only is given, as "'Twas o'er the Hills and far away."

Farquhar used this Scotch tune and an adaptation of the original words for Kite's song in *The Recruiting Officer*, Act II, Sc. iii.

Air XVII. Gin thou wert mine awn thing.

(O what Pain it is to part!)

In B.M. collection of *Old English Songs* (*c.* 1700) this piece is given as "A Scotch Song." The first stanza:

Gin thou wer't my e'ne Thing
I wou'd Love thee I wou'd Love thee
Gin thou wert my en'e Thing
So Dearly I wou'd Love thee
I wou'd take thee in my Arms
I'de Secure thee From all harms
Above all Mortals thou hast Charms
So Dearly do I Love thee.

This version also appears in *Comp. Coll.*, 1735. Another version is found in *Anc. and Mod. Scots Songs*, 1769:

Wert thou but mine ain thing,
I would love thee, I would love thee;
Wert thou but mine ain thing,
How dearly would I love thee!
As round the elm th' enamoured vine
Delights with wanton arms to twine,
So I'd encircle thee in mine,
And show how much I love thee.
Wert thou but, &c.

In *New Misc.*, 1727, as well as Watts, 1729, still different words are printed:

Of Race divine thou needs must be,
Since nothing earthly equals thee;
For Heaven's Sake, Oh! favour me,
Who only lives to love thee.

Ann thou were my ain Thing,
I would love thee, I would love thee;
Ann thou were my ain Thing,
How dearly would I love thee!

The song is also found in *Comp. Coll.*, 1735; *Nightingale*, 1738; *Merry Comp.*, 1742; *Charmer*, 1752.

Air XVIII. O the Broom.

(The Miser thus a Shilling sees.)

In *Roxburghe* II: "The Lovely Northern Lasse. Who in this ditty here complaining, shewes What harme she got milking her dadyes Ewes. To a pleasant Scotch[11] tune, called, The broome of Cowdonknowes." The first stanza:

Through Liddersdale as lately I went
I musing on did passe,
I heard a Maid was discontent:
She sigh'd and said alas,
All maids that ever deceived was,
Beare a part of these my woes,
For once I was a bonny Lasse,
When I milkt my dadyes Ewes.
With O the broome, the bonny broome,
The broome of Cowdonknowes,
Faine would I be in the North Countrey
To milke my dadyes Ewes.

In the collection of *Old English Songs* in B.M. is a sheet music piece, the version attributed to Ramsay. The burden here precedes the first stanza:

The Broom of Cowdenknows

O ye Broom ye bonny, bonny Broom,
The Broom of Cowden-knows,
I wish I were at Hame again
To milk my Daddys Ews.

[11] Chappell says he thinks this tune is not Scotch; only considered so by association of subjects. He also says Ramsay's version, "How blyth ilk Morn," is the first Scotch song on this subject, with the former English burden retained.

How blyth ilk Morn was I to see
The Swain come o'er the Hill.
He skipt ye Burn and flew to me,
I met him with good Will.
O ye Broom &c.

Archibald Bell, in his *Melodies of Scotland,* under "The Broom o' the Cowden Knowes," says, "This beautiful pastoral air is alluded to by Mr. Dauney, in his *Dissertation on the Skene MS.,* p. 142, under the name of *The bonnie Broom.* He considers its date to be about the year 1675." Yet the *Dancing Master* for 1652, ed. 2, has the air, entitled "The bonny bonny Broome," thus fixing the date considerably earlier in the seventeenth century.

The words are given, in various versions, in many eighteenth-century song collections, including *Tea-Table,* 1724; *Hive,* 1725; Watts, 1729; *Vocal Misc.,* 1734; *Merry Comp.,* 1742.

ACT II

Air I. Fill Ev'ry Glass.

(Fill ev'ry Glass, for Wine inspires us.)

In a B.M. collection of *English Songs* is a sheet music piece (catalogue date, 1710?): "A Drinking Song in Praise of our three Fam'd Generalls translated from the French by Mr. Durfey." The first stanza, with the original translation:[12]

Que chacun remplisse sonaverre,
Pour boire a nos trois Generaux,[13]
Par tout ou marchent ces Heros,
Ils menent a pres eux la victoire,
Que chacun remplisse son verre,
Pour boire a nous trois Generaux.

Fill every Glass, and recommend 'em,
We'll drink our three Generalls Health at large,
For whereso ere these Heroes march,
Conquest renown'd is sure t'attend 'em;
Fill every Glass, and recommend 'em,
We'll drink our Three Generals Healths at large.

The piece is also found in *Pills,* 1719, where the inconsistencies in spelling and word forms are corrected.

[12] The French words are copied here without corrections.
[13] Marlborough, Eugene, and D'Auverquerque.

Air II. March in Rinaldo, with Drums and Trumpets.

(Let us take the Road.)

This air is from Handel's earliest opera, *Rinaldo,* 1711, the English libretto of which was written by Aaron Hill, after the Italian of Rossi. It is one of the most spirited tunes in *The Beggar's Opera.* A song of tavern revelry, "Let the waiter bring clean glasses," gave it wide currency before Gay used it.

Air III. Would you have a Young Virgin.

(If the Heart of a Man is deprest with Cares.)

In *English Songs,* B.M. collection, 1790, Vol. VIII: "A Song in the last Act of the Modern Prophets Written by Mr. Durfey Sung by Mr. Pack." B.M. date for the sheet, 1709 (?).

Would ye have a young Virgin of fifteen years,
You must tickle her fancy, with sweets and dear's,
Ever toying, and playing, and sweetly, sweetly,
Sing a love sonnet, and charm her Ears.
Wittily, prettily talk her down,
Chace her, and praise her, if fair or Brown,
Sooth her, and smooth her,
And teize her, and please her,
And touch but her smicket, and all's your own.

Also in *Pills,* 1719; *Tea-Table,* 1724; *Vocal Misc.,* 1734; *Comp. Coll.,* 1735; *Goldfinch,* 1748; *Orpheus* (*Robin*), 1749; *Glasgow Coll.,* 1764.

In *Dancing Master,* 1728, is "Wou'd you have a young Virgin: Or, *Poor Robin's* Maggot." The latter half of this title was a common name for the music in the middle of the seventeenth century. Sarrazin says the air is still a favorite dance tune in northern Germany.

Air IV. Cotillon.

(Youth's the Season made for Joys.)

This air is actually a French tune, as suggested by the words of Macheath in the preceding passage. It was known in England, as "Zoney's Rant" or "Tony's Rant," during the early eighteenth century. Calmus finds it, with slight variations, in Le Sage's *Télémaque,* as "Ma commère quand je danse," and says it was printed in Germany, at Frankfurt, in 1664, and later at Leipzig.

Air V. All in a misty Morning.

(Before the Barn-door crowing.)

In *Pills,* 1700. The first stanza:

The Wiltshire Wedding

All in a misty Morning,
  Cloudy was the Weather,
I meeting with an old Man,
  Was cloathed all in Leather,
With ne'er a Shirt unto his Back,
  But Wool unto his Skin;
With how do you do? and how do you do?
  And how do you do agen?

The last two lines here are the refrain for all stanzas. These first verses have survived in modern *Mother Goose* collections.

This air was also called "The Old Man dressed in Leather," and "The London Prentice." In Walsh and Hare's musical edition (1732) it is listed as "A Beggar got a Beadle." The music appears in *Dancing Master,* 1651.

Air VI. When once I lay with another Man's Wife.

(The Gamesters and Lawyers are Jugglers alike.)

This song was used in D'Urfey's *The Wiltshire Maid,* being possibly an adaptation. The air, often found in the eighteenth century, was most commonly known as "The Winchester Wedding." It was also called "The King's Jig." See *Pills* and *Dancing Master.*

Air VII. When first I laid Siege to my Chloris.

(At the Tree I shall suffer with pleasure.)

In *Pills,* 1714, as "A Song." The words are by Sir Charles Sedley. The first stanza:

When first I lay'd Siege to my *Chloris,*
When first I laid Siege to my Chloris;
Cannon Oaths I brought down
  To batter the Town.
  And boom'd her with amorous Stories.

Also in *Hive,* 1727; *Vocal Misc.,* 1734; *Comp. Coll.,* 1735; *Jovial Comp.,* 1740 (?); and *Orpheus* (*Robin*), 1749.

Air VIII. Courtiers, Courtiers think it no harm.

(Man may escape from Rope and Gun.)

In *Pills,* 1700: "The Beggars Delight, As it was Sung at the Theatre-Royal. To a pleasant New Tune." The first stanza:

Courtiers, Courtiers, think it no harm
That silly poor Swains in Love should be,
For Love lies hid in Rags all torn,
As well as in Silks and Bravery:
For the Beggar he loves his Lass as dear,
As he that hath thousands, thousands, thousands,
He that has thousand Pounds a Year.

Also in broadside form in a B.M. collection of *Ballads,* dated 1670-1710. In *Old English Songs,* B.M. collection, is "The Beggar's Dear Joy. Set for the German Flute. Courtiers Courtiers think it no Scorn," B.M. date, 1730 (?). Chappell prints the first line thus, "Courtiers, courtiers, think not in Scorn."

Air IX. A lovely Lass to a Friar came.

(Thus when a good Huswife sees a Rat.)

In a B.M. collection of *English Songs* (catalogue date, 1710?) is "The Fryar and the Nun." The first stanza:

A lovely Lass to a Fryar came,
To Confess in the Morning Early:
In what my Dear was you to blame,
Now tell to me sincerely,
I have done Sir what I dare not name,
With a man that loves me Dearly.

Also in *Tea-Table,* 1724; Watts, 1731; *Vocal Misc.,* 1734; *Comp. Coll.,* 1735; *Merry Comp.,* 1742; *Charmer,* 1752; *Glasgow Coll.,* 1764.

In *Dancing Master,* 1727 (?), Vol. III, this tune is marked "The Old Fryer." Chappell speaks of its antiquity.

Air X. 'Twas when the Sea was roaring.

(How cruel are the Traytors.)

This song is from Gay's *The What d'ye Call It* (1715), Act II, Sc. viii. The music is by Handel. The first stanza:

'Twas when the seas were roaring
With hollow blasts of wind;
A damsel lay deploring,
All on a rock reclined.
Wide o'er the rolling billows
She cast a wistful look;
Her head was crown'd with willows
That tremble o'er the brook.

This piece was printed in sheet form, and is found in B.M. collection of *Songs:* "Sung in the Comick Tragick Pastorall Farce, or what d'ye call it." In Watts, 1729, it appears as "The Faithful Maid, Set by Mr. Handel." In the *Musical Entertainer* it is called "The Melancholy Nymph." Gay's original words are found in many eighteenth-century song collections.

Air XI. The Sun had loos'd his weary Teams.

(The first time at the Looking-glass.)

In *Pills,* 1699, as "A Song." The first stanza:

The Sun had loos'd his weary Team,
And turn'd his Steads a grazing;
Ten Fathems deep in *Neptune's* Stream,
His *Thetis* was embracing:
The Stars they tripp'd in the Firmament,
Like Milkmaids on a *May-day;*
Or Country Lasses a Mumming sent,
Or School Boys on a Play-day.

Also in *Comp. Coll.,* 1735. In *Orpheus* (*Robin*), 1749, the piece begins, "Old Sol had loos'd his weary Teams"; the plural form "Teams" follows Gay's wording exactly.

Chappell says the air is the same as that called "The Hemp-Dresser, or The London Gentlewoman"; found in *Dancing Master,* 1651. The words were printed in D'Urfey's *A Third Collection of New Songs,* 1685, as "The Winchester Christening."

Air XII. How happy are we.

(When you censure the Age.)

In B.M. collection of *English Ballads,* Vol. VII, is a sheet music edition of "A New Song in the Play call'd the Ladys fine Aires Sung by Mr. Pack in the figure of a Bawd Composd by Mr. Barret." The first stanza:

How happy are we,
Who from thinking are free,
That Curbing disease o' the mind,
Can indulge, every Tast,
Love where we like best,
Not by dull reputation Confin'd.

Also in *Pills*, 1714; *Tea-Table*, 1724; *Vocal Misc.*, 1734; *Nightingale*, 1738; *Merry Comp.*, 1742; *Goldfinch*, 1748; *Orpheus* (*Thrush*), 1749.

Air XIII. Of a noble Race was Shenkin.

(Is then his Fate decreed, Sir?)

In *Pills*, 1699, as "A Song." The first stanza:

Of noble Race was *Shinking*,[14]
The Line of *Owen Tudor*,
Thum, thum, thum, thum,
But her[15] renown is fled and gone,
Since cruel Love pursu'd her.

In Vol. V of B.M. collection of *English Songs* this piece is printed in sheet form, "A Song in the Play call'd the Richmond Heiress, the words by Mr. Durfey sung by Mr. Bowman."

The *Dancing Master*, 1695, has the air, entitled "Of Noble Race was Shinkin."[16] The words are also in *Vocal Misc.*, 1734, and *Orpheus* (*Thrush*), 1749.

Air XIV.

(You'll think e'er many Days ensue.)

I have been unable to find words for this air, aside from a song in *Hamlet*. Chappell says the tune was used with "How should I your true love know?" by Mrs. Forster (then Miss Field) as Ophelia, at Drury Lane.

This and the air to "Cease your Funning" are the only two in *The Beggar's Opera* not named.

[14] This suggests D'Urfey's song beginning "Sawny was tall and of noble race."
[15] As masculine pronoun, Welsh. Sometimes written "hur."
[16] Note the different ways of spelling this,—Shenkin, Shinking, and Shinkin.

Air XV. London Ladies.

(If you at an Office solicit your Due.)

In *Roxburghe* II this is printed as "Advice to the Ladies of London, In the Choice of their Husbands. To an Excellent new Court Tune." The words are by D'Urfey. The first stanza:

Ladies of London both wealthy and fair,
Whom every Town Fop is pursuing;
Still of your Persons and Purses take care
The greatest deceit lies in Wooing:
From the first rank of the bonny brisk sparks
Their Vices I here will discover;
Down to the basest mechanick degree,
That so you may chuse out your Lover.

Also in *Pills,* 1707. The tune only is in *Dancing Master,* 1686, in an appendix, as "Ladies of London." In B.M. collection of *English Ballads* (1670-1710) is a broadside, "Advice to Young Gentlemen; or, An Answer to the Ladies of London. To the Tune of, The Ladies of London."

Air XVI. All in the Downs.

(Thus when the Swallow, seeking Prey.)

This is Gay's ballad of "Sweet William's Farewell to Black-eyed Susan." The first stanza:

All in the Downs the fleet was moor'd,
The streamers waving in the wind,
When black-eyed Susan came aboard,
Oh! where shall I my true love find!
Tell me, ye jovial sailors, tell me true,
If my sweet William sails among the crew.

The song appears, in sheet form, in B.M. collection of *Songs,* and is also in Watts, 1730, with the music. The words are found in many eighteenth-century song collections, including *Tea-Table,* 1724; *Hive,* 1726; *Merry Comp.,* 1742.

Carey, Haydon, Leveridge, and Sandoni wrote music to Gay's original words. The air by Leveridge is said to have been adapted from an older melody.

Air XVII. Have you heard of a frolicksome Ditty.

(How happy could I be with either.)

Chappell (*Popular Music*) prints a few verses of the original ballad, which is called "The jolly Gentleman's frolick; or, The City Ramble":

Give ear to a frolicsome ditty,
Of one who a wager would lay,
He'd pass every watch in the city
And never a word would he say,
But dal dera, rara, dal dara, &c.

There are several humorous ballads to the same tune. Chappell quotes from one, under the title "Give ear to a frolicsome ditty; or, The Rant":

I pray now attend to this ditty,
A merry and frolicsome song,
'Tis of a young spark in the City,
By night he went ranting along.

Another begins, "Come hither, attend to my ditty."

This air, says Chappell (*National English Airs*), is not barred correctly in *The Beggar's Opera* or *Don Quixote in England;* it should be in 9-4 or 9-8 time, instead of 6-4 or 6-8.

Air XVIII. Irish Trot.

(I'm bubbled.)

There is an air of this name in *Dancing Master,* 1651, 1652, and 7th ed., 1686. Also known as "Hyde Park."

Air XIX.

(Cease your Funning.)

I have not been able to trace this air definitely, or find words for it. It is one of the two unnamed tunes in *The Beggar's Opera.* Chappell writes, "It is traditionally said to have been composed expressly for the opera by a lady, a friend of the poet."[17] George Hogarth (*British Song*) calls the music an "Ancient British Melody." If it is an old ballad tune, Gay's song gave it a new name.

John Parry, editor of *Welsh and Scotch Melodies,* regards this air as an ornamented version of "Llwyn on, or The Ash Grove"; but

[17] *National English Airs,* p. 131.

Chappell thinks it more probable that the Welsh air was derived from that in *The Beggar's Opera*.[18]

John Thomas, however, says that "the graceful 'Llwyn Onn' (The Ash Grove) appears in a mutilated form as 'Cease your funning,' in Gay's 'Beggar's Opera,' A. D. 1728."[19]

One possible clue to a definite source is this: in Walsh and Hare's musical edition (1732) the tune is given as "Charming Billy." This may not be the name of the original song, but in *Hive*, 1727, there is a piece called "Prithee Billy," listed as set to the tune of "Charming Billy." Same words in *Tea-Table*, 1724; *Vocal Misc.*, 1734; *Nightingale*, 1738; *Orpheus* (*Robin*), 1749.

Air XX. Good-morrow, Gossip Joan.

(Why how now, Madam Flirt?)

In *Pills*, 1714, as "The Woman's Complaint to her Neighbour." The first two stanzas:

Good morrow Gossip *Joan*,
  Where have you been a walking;
I have for you at home,
  A Budget full of talking
    Gossip *Joan*.

My Sparrow's flown away,
  And will no more come to me;
I've broke a Glass to day,
  The price will quite undo me,
    Gossip *Joan*.

Also in B.M. collection of *Old English Songs*, Vol. I, in a sheet music version, as "Gossip Joan," B.M. date, 1710 (?). In B.M. collection of *English Ballads*, 1790, Vol. IV, is "The Sequel to Gossip Joan, by Mr. A. Bradley," a song with the same meter.

Air XXI. Irish Howl.

(No Power on Earth can e'er divide.)

In Vol. II of B.M. collection of *Old English Songs* is a sheet music piece (catalogue date, 1740?) which comes near to the song Gay adapted, if it is not the same one. The date may be too late, by far. The music is identical, and the title is "The Irish Howl." The first stanza:

[18] *Popular Music*, II, 665.
[19] *Welsh Melodies*, I, 6.

Remember Damon you did tell,
In Chastity you lov'd me well,
But now alass I am undone,
And here am left to make my Moan.
Haugh hora in amboora,
Ho an ho derry, hi an hiderry,
Hoo hoo derry, derry, derry derry amboora.

Also in *Vocal Misc.*, 1734. Music in *Dancing Master*, 1726.

Air XXII. The Lass of Paties' Mill.

(I like the Fox shall grieve.)

In B.M. collection of *English Songs* is a sheet music version (catalogue date, 1725?) of "The Lass of Patties Mill." The first stanza:

The Lass of Patties[20] Mill, sa bony blith and gay;
In spight of aw my skill, she stole my heart away;
When tedding of the hay, bare headed on the green,
Love midst her locks did play, and wanton'd in her een.

Also in *Tea-Table*, 1724; *New Misc.*, 1727; Watts, 1729; *Vocal Misc.*, 1734; *Comp. Coll.*, 1735; *Merry Comp.*, 1742; *Orpheus (Robin)*, 1749; *Syren*, 1750 (?); *Charmer*, 1752; *Chearful Comp.*, 1768.

The editor of *Illustrated Scotch Songs* (1851, etc.) assigns this piece to Allan Ramsay and quotes Burns as calling it one of Ramsay's best songs. He also locates the mill: "Patie's or Patrick's Mill is supposed to have been on the south bank of the Irwine, near Newmills, in Ayrshire."

ACT III

Air I. If Love's a sweet Passion.

(When young at the Bar.)

In *Pills*, 1699, as "A Song." The first stanza:

If Love's a sweet Passion, why does it torment,
If a bitter, oh tell me whence comes my content?
Since I suffer with Pleasure, why should I complain,
Or grieve at my Fate when I know 'tis in vain?
Yet so pleasing the Pain is, so soft is the Dart,
That at once it both wounds me and tickles my Heart.

[20] The spelling varies to Patie, Peatie, and Peaty.

Also in 1790 collection of *English Ballads,* B.M., Vol. IV, in a sheet music version, as sung by Mr. Lowe; *Tea-Table,* 1724; *New Misc.,* 1727; *Vocal Misc.,* 1734; *Comp. Coll.,* 1735; *Nightingale,* 1738; *Vocal Medley,* 1740 (?); *Merry Comp.,* 1742; *Orpheus (Thrush),* 1749; *Syren,* 1750 (?); *Clio and Euterpe,* 1762; *Glasgow Coll.,* 1764; *Chearful Comp.,* 1768.

In B.M. collection of *Old English Songs* is a sheet music version, marked "By Mr. H. Purcell." The tune, according to the B.M. catalogue, is from *The Fairy Queen.* This opera, acted in 1692, was an adaptation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream.* In *London Songster,* 1767, the piece is printed as "a favourite Song, sung by Mrs. Scott, in The Conscious Lovers. Set by Mr. Blaidon." The tune is different, however.

Air II. South-Sea Ballad.

(My Love is all Madness and Folly.)

This air is found in the *Dancing Master* (1727?), labeled "South Sea." There were probably several "South Sea" ballads around 1720. Wright (*Caricature History of the Georges*) speaks of a celebrated "South Sea Ballad, or, Merry Remarks upon Exchange Alley Bubbles," to the tune of "The Grand Elixir."

In B.M. collection of *English Songs* (and Vol. II of *English Ballads*) is "The South Sea Ballad—Set by a Lady" (catalogue date, 1720?). The tune, however, is not the same. The first stanza:

> Change Alley's so thin that a Man may now walk,
> And if hel but listen may hear himself talk,
> For Since the Suppression of Bubbles in June
> Those clamorous Catches are quite out of tune.
> No more of the Hubbles, nor Bubbles, we See,
> But all the whole Nation attends the South Sea.

In B.M. collection of *English Ballads,* Vol. VIII, is "The Second Part of the South Sea Ballad. Set by a Lady" (catalogue date, 1721?). It begins, "What a terrible turn of a sudden is here." This also is to a different tune.

Air III. Packington's Pound.

(Thus Gamesters united in Friendship are found.)

Chappell (*Roxburghe,* note) says the air is by Thomas Paggington, a musician of Henry VII. It was called "Paggington's Pound"

and was sometimes corrupted into "Pack's Pound." It may have taken its later name from Sir John Packington. Chappell (*Popular Music*) says the tune is in Queen Elizabeth's *Virginal Book, A New Book of Tablature,* 1596, and a *Collection of English Songs,* printed at Amsterdam in 1634. Jonson introduces a song to this air in *Bartholomew Fair,* Act III, Sc. v. In *Wit and Drollery,* 1661, is a song to the same music, "My masters and friends, and good people draw near." Various ballads flourished to this tune, including: "The Ballad of the Cloak"; "A Caveat for Cut-purses"; "The Crafty Maid of the West"; "Oxford in Mourning"; "An Amourous Dialogue between John and his Mistris"; "The Brickmaker's Lamentation from Newgate"; "Rome in an Uproar"; and "Newgate's Garland," by Gay himself.

Air IV. Lillibullero.

(The Modes of the Court so common are grown.)

Both Percy and Chappell print this ballad. The latter calls it "A new Irish song of Lil-li bur lero, to an excellent new tune." The first stanza:

> Ho! brother Teague, dost hear de decree? Lilli burlero, bullen a la,
> Dat we shall have a new deputie, Lilli burlero, bullen a la.
> Lero, lero, lilli burlero, Lilli bullero, bullen a la,
> Lero, lero, lilli burlero, lilliburlero, bullen a la.

This very common and very popular song was one of the famous ballads of religious and political controversy, ridiculing both the Papists and the Irish. The words are by Thomas, Lord Wharton; the music is by Purcell, or was adapted by him. The author is said to have boasted that his ballad sang James out of three kingdoms. The terms "Lilliburlero" and "Bullen a la" are supposed to have been words used by Irish Papists in the massacre of 1641.

Chappell says the air is in Playford's *Music's Handmaid,* 1678, and *The Delightful Companion,* 1686; and that the words first appeared in *The Muses' Farewell to Popery and Slavery,* 1689. The tune is also found in *Dancing Master,* 1690.

Among the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century ballads which flourished to this tune are these: "The courageous Soldier of the West"; "The Reading Skirmish"; "Undaunted London-Derry"; "The False-hearted Glover"; "There lives an Ale-draper near New-palace-yard"; and "You that love Mirth, attend to my Song." The words now best known are those in praise of "Nottingham Ale."

Air V. Down in the North Country.

(What Gudgeons are we Men.)

In B.M. collection of *English Songs* is a piece in sheet form (catalogue date, 1705?), "The Farmers Daughter of Merry Wakefield." The first stanza:

Down in the north Country
As ancient reports do tell
There lies a famous Country Town
Some cal it merry wakefield
And in this Country Town
A Farmer there did dwell
Whose Daughter would to market go
Her treasure for to sell.

Also in *Vocal Misc.*, 1734; *Comp. Coll.*, 1735; *Nightingale*, 1738; *Orpheus* (*Linnet*), 1749.

Chappell says the air is in *Dancing Master* as "The Merry Milk Maids"; and that the music is a version of Purcell's tune to "Ah, cruel, bloody fate."

Air VI. A Shepherd kept Sheep.

(In the Days of my Youth I could bill like a Dove.)

In *Pills*, 1707, as "A Song." The first stanza:

A Shepherd kept sheep on a hill so high, fa la la, &c.
And there came a pretty maid passing by, fa, la, &c.
Shepherd, quoth she, dost thou want e'er a Wife,
No by my troth I'm not weary of my life, fa, la la, &c.

The tune, however, is different.

Also in *Nightingale*, 1738; *Orpheus* (*Linnet*), 1749.

Air VII. One Evening, having lost my Way.

(I'm like a Skiff on the Ocean tost.)

In B.M. collection of *English Songs* is a piece in sheet form (catalogue date 1720?), "The Happy Clown. A Song. the words by Mr. Burkhead." The first stanza:

One Evening having lost my way,
By chance I came into a Wood,
Soll had been very hot that Day,
I under a Covert Stood,
Long time I had not tarried there,
Before I heard a russling Nigh,
A Female voice said stay my Dear
The Man cry'd Zoons not I.

Also in *Goldfinch,* 1748; *Orpheus* (*Thrush*), 1749. The tune only is in *Dancing Master,* 1718. In Walsh and Hare's musical edition (1732) it is listed as "Do you fancy a Semstress brisk and gay."

This air was also widely known as "Walpole, or The Happy Clown." It has even been suggested that the Minister, present on the first night, could recognize in Gay's use of the tune a point of personal satire.

Air VIII. Now Roger, I'll tell thee, because thou'rt my Son.

(When a Wife's in her Pout.)

I have not been able to trace this air, or find words for it.

Air IX. O Bessy Bell.

(A Curse attends that Woman's Love.)

In the *Hive,* 1727, is "Bessy Bell and Mary Gray." The first stanza:

O *Bessy Bell* and *Mary Gray,*
They are twa bonny lasses,
They bigg'd a bower on yon Burn-brae
And theek'd it o'er wi' rashes.
Fair *Bessy Bell* I lov'd yestreen,
And thought I ne'er cou'd alter;
But *Mary Gray's* two pawky een,
They gar my fancy falter.

This piece is also found, in sheet form, in B.M. collection of *Ballads,* Vol. V, as "A Scotch Song. Sung by Mrs. Robinson at the Kings Theatre in the Hay Market." Also in *Tea-Table,* 1724; Watts, 1729; *Vocal Misc.,* 1734; *Comp. Coll.,* 1735; *Merry Comp.,* 1742; *Orpheus* (*Thrush*), 1749; *Charmer,* 1752; *Glasgow Coll.,* 1764; *Chearful Comp.,* 1768; *Anc. and Mod. Scots Songs,* 1769.

This song has often been attributed to Allan Ramsay, but Ritson says his version is a new one, retaining only a few original lines, as at the beginning. Ritson criticizes Ramsay for printing his own

trifling stanzas instead of the ballad founded on the true history of Bessy Bell and Mary Gray. These girls, the daughters of two neighboring lords, took the plague and died in a secluded bower where they had sought refuge.

Air X. Would Fate to me Belinda give.

(Among the Men, Coquets we find.)

In B.M collection of *English Songs* is "A Song set to Musick by Mr. Wilford" (catalogue date, 1710?). The first stanza:

> Wou'd fate to me Bellinda give,
> With her alone I'd Chuse to Live.
> Nor with her cou'd I more require,
> Nor a greater, nor a greater, nor a greater Bliss desire.

Also in *Tea-Table,* 1724; *Hive,* 1727; Watts, 1729; *Vocal Misc.,* 1734; *Comp. Coll.,* 1735; *Nightingale,* 1738; *Merry Comp.,* 1742; *Goldfinch,* 1748; *Charmer,* 1752; *Glasgow Coll.,* 1764.

Air XI. Come, sweet Lass.

(Gay's first line is same as title of air.)

In *Pills,* 1699. The first stanza:

> Come Sweet Lass,
> This bonny Weather,
> Let's together;
> Come Sweet Lass,
> Les's trip it on the Grass:
> Ev'ry where,
> Poor *Jockey* seeks his Dear,
> And unless you appear,
> He sees no Beauty here.

The tune appears as "Greenwich Park" in *Dancing Master,* 1698. The original ballad, called "Slighted Jockey," was published in *The Compleat Academy of Complements,* 1685.

In *The Orpheus,* New Series, No. 316 (B.M. date for series, 1879, etc.), G. F. Huntley has a modernized version of this air, with the original words.

Air XII. The last time I went o'er the Moor.

(Hither, dear Husband, turn your Eyes.)

This song, attributed to Allan Ramsay, is contained in that author's *New Misc.,* 1727. The first stanza:

The last Time I came o'er the Moor,
I left my Love behind me;
Ye Pow'rs! what Pain do I endure,
When soft Ideas mind me?
Soon as the ruddy Morn display'd
The beaming Day ensuing,
I met betimes my lovely Maid,
In fit Retreats for Wooing.

Also in *Tea-Table,* 1724; Watts, 1729; *Vocal Misc.,* 1734; *Comp. Coll.,* 1735; *Merry Comp.,* 1742; *Orpheus* (*Robin*), 1749; *Syren,* 1750 (?); *Charmer,* 1752; *Glasgow Coll.,* 1764; *Chearful Comp.,* 1768; *Anc. and Mod. Scots Songs,* 1769.

Ritson lists the piece as "The Happy Lover's Reflections," by Ramsay. The editor of *Illustrated Scotch Songs* (1851, etc.) quotes Burns as calling Ramsay's words "unworthy of the divine air." Ramsay may have adapted an earlier ballad. In *Pills,* 1699, is "A new Scotch Song," with similar words (though to another tune) and this first line, "As I went o'er yon misty Moor." Archibald Bell (*Melodies of Scotland*) says the Skene MS. has as a first line for this song, "Alas! that I came o'er the moor."

Air XIII. Tom Tinker's my true Love.

(Which way shall I turn me.)

In *Pills,* 1714, as "Tom Tinker." This coarse old ballad begins:

Tom Tinker's my true love, and I am his Dear,
And I will go with him his Budget to bear.

Gay's last two lines to the same air are merely an adaptation of the following:

This way, that way, which way you will,
I am sure I say nothing that you can take ill.

Also in *Nightingale,* 1738. There were two airs with this name; both occur in various editions of *Dancing Master,* 1650 to 1698. The *Roxburghe* collection contains an old ballad beginning, "Tom Tinker's wife, Joan Ruggles sat."

Air XIV. I am a poor Shepherd undone.

(When my Hero in Court appears.)

In *Pills,* 1714, as "The Distress'd Shepherd. A Song." The first stanza:

I am a poor Shepher'd undone,
And cannot be Cur'd by Art;
For a Nymph as bright as the Sun,
Has stole away my Heart:
And how to get it again,
There's none but she can tell;
To cure me of my pain,
By saying she loves me well.
And alas poor Shepherd,
Alack and a welladay;
Before I was in love,
Oh every Month was *May*.

Also in B.M. collection of *English Ballads,* 1790, Vol. IV; B.M. *Songs,* sheet music (catalogue date, 1720?); *Vocal Misc.,* 1734; *Nightingale,* 1738; *Merry Comp.,* 1742; *Orpheus (Thrush),* 1749; *Chearful Comp.,* 1768. The air only is in *Dancing Master,* under two names, the other being "Hey, ho, my honey."

Air XV. Ianthe the lovely.

(When he holds up his Hand arraign'd for his Life.)

In *Bagford Ballads* (B.M.), as "The Loyal Swain: Or, The Happy Pair. Sung before Her Majesty to a New Play-House Tune" (catalogue date, 1705?). The first stanza:

Ianthe the Lovely, the Joy of her Swain,
By *Iphis* was lov'd, and lov'd *Iphis* again;
She liv'd in the Youth, and the Youth in the Fair;
Their Pleasure was equal, and equal their Care:
No Time, no Enjoyment, their Dotage withdrew;
But the longer they liv'd, but the longer they liv'd,
Still the fonder they grew.

Also in B.M. collection of *English Ballads,* 1790, Vol. IV, as "The Happy Pair. A Song Set by Mr. John Barrett. Sung by Mrs. Linsey in York buildings"; *Pills,* 1709; *Hive,* 1726; *Vocal Misc.,* 1734; *Merry Comp.,* 1742; *Goldfinch,* 1748.

In *Vocal Medley,* 1740 (?), the song is entitled "Ianthe and Iphis," and the first line reads, "Ianthe the lovely the Joy of the Plain." In *Comp. Coll.,* 1735, it is printed to the tune of "When he holds up his Hand arraign'd for his Life"; in this case the influence of *The Beggar's Opera* is apparent.

Extra Air.[21]

A Cobler there was.

(Our selves, like the Great.)

In Watts, 1729, is "The Cobler's End. Set by Mr. Leveridge." The first stanza:

> A Cobler there was, and he liv'd in a Stall,
> Which serv'd him for Parlour, for Kitchen, and Hall,
> No Coin in his Pocket, nor Care in his Pate,
> No Ambition had he, nor Duns at his Gate:
> Derry down, down, down, derry down.

Also in *Vocal Misc.*, 1734; *Orpheus* (*Linnet*), 1749; *Syren*, 1750 (?); *Glasgow Coll.*, 1764; *Chearful Comp.*, 1768; *Musical Entertainer.*

Chappell says the air was also called "Derry Down," "Abbot of Canterbury," and "Death and the Cobbler."

Air XVI. Bonny Dundee.

(The Charge is prepar'd.)

In *Pills*, 1707, is "Jockey's Escape from Dundee; and the Parson's Daughter whom he had Mow'd." The first stanza:

> Where got'st thou the *Haver-mill bonack*,
> Blind Booby cans't thou not see;
> Ise got it out of the *Scotch-man's* wallet,
> As he lig lousing him under a tree:
> Come fill up my Cup, come fill up my Can,
> Come saddle my Horse, and call up my Man;
> Come open the Gates, and let me go free,
> And shew me the way to bonny *Dundee.*

In *Anc. and Mod. Scots Songs*, 1769, there is a song called "Bonny Dundee," but only a few lines are like the original. In the B.M. *Collection of Old Ballads*, 1723 (No. XL), is "Bonny *Dundee:* Or, *Jockey's* Deliverance. Being the Valiant Escape from *Dundee*, and the Parson's Daughter, whom he had mow'd. To an Excellent Tune, call'd, *Bonny Dundee.*" The words have slight variations. There is an air called "Bonny Dundee" in *Dancing Master*, 1686.

These early ballads should not be confused with later ones having the same title, like that by Sir Walter Scott.

[21] See *ante*, p. 158.

Air XVII. Happy Groves.

(O cruel, cruel, cruel Case!)

In *Pills,* 1712, as "The Pilgrim, Tune by Mr. John Barrett." The first two lines:

> Oh! happy, happy Groves, Witness of our tender loves,
> Oh! happy, happy shade, where first our vows were made.

Also in B.M. collection of *English Songs,* Vol. V, sheet music version; *Tea-Table,* 1724; *Hive,* 1727; *Comp. Coll.,* 1735; *Merry Comp.,* 1742; *Goldfinch,* 1748.

Air XVIII. Of all the Girls that are so smart.

(Of all the Friends in time of Grief.)

This song is the famous "Sally in our Alley," words and music by Henry Carey. The first stanza (from *Poems on Several Occasions,* 1729):

> Of all the Girls that are so smart
> There's none like pretty Sally,
> She is the Darling of my Heart,
> And she lives in our Alley.
> There is no Lady in the Land
> Is half so sweet as Sally,
> She is the Darling of my Heart,
> And she lives in our Alley.

The verses are found in many eighteenth-century song collections, often in parody or adaptation. To this tune were written two of the ballads on Polly Peachum (see *ante,* pp. 28 and 33).

Air XIX. Britons strike home.

(Since I must swing.)

This air, by Purcell, was written for the opera *Bonduca.* Chappell says that it was evidently a trumpet melody, and that it became a national favorite like "Rule Britannia" and "God save the King." The *Musical Entertainer* has these words for it:

> To Arms to Arms to Arms to Arms . . .
> Your Ensigns strait display,
> Now, now, now, now . . .
> Set the Battle in array.

Air XX. Chevy Chase.

(But now again my Spirits sink.)

This is the famous ballad of "Chevy Chase," apparently the modern version. In *Pills,* 1707, it is called "An Unhappy Memorable Song, of the Hunting in Chevy-Chase, between Earl Piercy of England, and Earl Dowglas of Scotland." The first stanza:

God prosper long our noble King,
Our Lives and Safeties all;
A woful Hunting once there did,
In *Chevy-Chase* befal.

Addison (*Spectator* paper, No. 70) says, "The old Song of *Chevy-Chase* is the favourite Ballad of the common People of *England.*" The original ballad words (two versions) are best known through Percy's *Reliques.* There are many other songs to this ancient tune.

Air XXI. To old Sir Simon the King.

(But Valour the stronger grows.)

In *Wit and Humor,* 1682, as "Old Simon the King." The first stanza:

In a humor I was late
As many good fellows be,
To think no matters of State,
But to seek for good companie
That best contented me,
I travell'd up and down,
No company I could find
Till I came to the sign of the Crown;
My hostess was sick of the Mumps,
The Maid was ill at ease,
The Tapster was drunk in his Dumps,
They were all of one disease
Says Old *Simon*[22] the King.

Also in *Pills,* 1699. It is a lively old Elizabethan ballad. According to Chappell, there were two versions of the air, under various names. The *Dancing Master* has the air, listed both as "Old Simon the King" and as "Ragged and torn and true."

The *New Misc.,* 1727, contains "A Bacchanal Song. To the Tune of, Auld Sir Symon the King." Here is the nearest approach to Gay's title.

[22] It has been conjectured that this refers to Simon Wadloe, a tavernkeeper.

Air XXII. Joy to great Caesar.

(If thus —— A Man can die.)

In *Pills,* 1709, "The King's Health. Sett to Farinel's Grounds. In Six Parts by Mr. D'Urfey." The first part runs:

Joy to great *Caesar,*
Long Life, Love & Pleasure;
'Tis a Health that Divine is,
Fill the Bowl high as mine is;
Let none fear a Feaver,
But take it off thus Boys;
Let the King live for ever,
'Tis no matter for us Boys.

Also in B.M. collection of *English Ballads,* 1790, Vol. IV, as "Joy to Great Caesar"; *Bacchanalian Songs,* 1729; *Vocal Misc.,* 1734; *Comp. Coll.,* 1735; *Orpheus* (*Thrush*), 1749. Also in B.M. *Old English Songs,* 1700, with music for the flute.

In *Pills,* 1707, is a "Medley, Compos'd out of several Songs," of which the first line is "State and Ambition, all Joy to Great *Caesar.*" Also in *Orpheus* (*Robin*), 1749.

D'Urfey's song was written against the Whigs; he had employed the same tune with verses against the Papists. Gay's use of this Italian air is interesting, in view of his satire.

Air XXIII. There was an old Woman.

(So I drink off this Bumper.)

In *Pills,* 1700. The first stanza:

There was an Old Woman that had but one Son,
And he had neither Land nor Fee;
He took great Pains,
But got little Gains,
Yet fain a Landlord he would be.
With a fadariddle la, fa la da riddle la, fa la da fa la la re.

Also in *Lark,* 1740. In *Pills,* 1707, is a similar song, to a different tune, "There was an old Woman liv'd under a hill," with the title of "The Trooper Watering his Nagg." Music in *Dancing Master,* 1716, as "Puddings and Pies."

Air XXIV. Did you ever hear of a gallant Sailor.

(But can I leave my pretty Hussies.)

In *Pills,* 1707, as "The Unconstant Woman. To a New Tune." The first stanza:

Did you not hear of a gallant Sailor,
  Whose Pockets they were lin'd with Gold;
He fell in Love with a pretty Creature,
  As I to you the Truth unfold:
With a kind salute, and without dispute,
  He thought to gain her for his own:
Unconstant Woman proves true to no Man,
  She has gone and left me all alone.

Chappell prints another ballad, older than this one, which D'Urfey seems to have adapted. It begins:

Heard you not of a valiant trooper
  That had his pockets well lin'd with gold,
He was in love with a gallant lady,
  As I to you shall hear unfold.

Air XXV. Why are mine Eyes still flowing.

(Their Eyes, their Lips, their Busses.)

In B.M. collection of *Ballads* (dated 1670-1710) is a broadside called "The Constant Lover: or, Celia's Glory exprest to the Life. A pleasant new Song (as it's sung after the *Italian* manner) and great in Request at Court, and in the City. To a pleasant new Tune of, *'Why are my Eyes still flow – – – – – ing.'* " The first stanza:

Why are my Eyes still flow – – – – – ing?
  Why do's my Heart thus trembling move?
Why do I sigh when go – – – – – ing
  To see the Darling Saint I love?
Ah! she's my Heaven, and in my Eye
  Love's Dei – – – – – ty:
There is no Life like to that she can give,
Nor any Death like taking my leave.

Also in *Bagford Ballads,* broadside (B.M. date, 1680?), as "The Happy Lover: or Celia won by Aminta's Loyalty"; *Pills,* 1700. In B.M. collection of *Ballads* (dated 1670-1710) is a broadside, "An Excellent new Song; Or, a true Touch of the Times. To the Tune of The Loyal Health; or, Why are my Eyes still flowing."

Air XXVI. Green Sleeves.

(Since Laws were made for ev'ry Degree.)

This famous tune was used for many songs. There are different versions of the air, also. Chappell prints one set of words from "A Handefull of Pleasant Delites," 1584, where the piece is entitled "*A New Courtly Sonet,* of the Lady Greensleeves." The first stanza:

Alas! my love, you do me wrong,
To cast me off discourteously,
And I have loved you so long,
Delighting in your company.
Greensleeves was all my joy,
Greensleeves was my delight,
Greensleeves was my heart of gold,
And who but Lady Greensleeves.

Chappell says this is apparently a version of an earlier, religious ballad of Reformation times. The tune was popular in the Elizabethan period. Shakespeare refers to "Green Sleeves" in *Merry Wives,* Act II, Sc. i, and Act V, Sc. v. Later it became a Cavalier tune. In *Dancing Master,* 1686, the air is called "Green-Sleeves and Pudding-Pies," and in *Dancing Master,* 1721, it is called "Green Sleeves and Yellow Lace."

Air XXVII. All you that must take a Leap.

(Would I might be hang'd!)

In B.M. collection of *English Songs* is a sheet music piece (catalogue date, 1710?), "A Hymn upon the Execution of two Criminals by Mr. Ramondon." The first stanza:

All you that must take a leap in the dark,
Pitty the fate of Lawson and Clark;
Cheated with hope by Mercy amus'd,
Betray'd by the sinfull ways we us'd,
Cropt in our prime of strength and youth,
Who can but weep at so sad a truth.

Also in *Pills,* 1714; *Vocal Misc.,* 1734; *Nightingale,* 1738; *Orpheus* (*Linnet*), 1749.

Air XXVIII. Lumps of Pudding.

(Thus I stand like the Turk.)

In *Pills,* 1714, as "Lumps of Pudding." The first two stanzas:

When I was in the low Country,
When I was in the low Country;
What slices of pudding and pieces of Bread,
My Mother gave me when I was in need?

My Mother she kill'd a good fat Hog,
She made such Puddings wou'd Choak a dog,
And I shall ne'er forget till I dee,
What lumps of Pudding my Mother gave me.

In *Dancing Master,* 1701, the music appears as "Lumps of Pudding."

III

NOTES

(With page references by chapters.)

Introduction

xxi. The table of performances casually compiled by the writer shows at least one item for each year from 1728 to 1837, in direct sequence, revealing a remarkable run up into the nineteenth century. Only twenty-one years between 1837 and 1886, the date of the last important nineteenth-century performance, are not represented: 1838, 1843, 1844, 1847, 1856, 1857, 1859, 1863, 1865-1869, 1872, 1874, 1875, 1880-1883, and 1885.

Chapter I

1. There have been several misstatements about the place of performance. O'Keeffe (*Recollections,* II, 425) says *The Beggar's Opera* "came out at Covent-Garden." More surprising is the mistake of Oxenford (ed. of late nineteenth century), assigning it to D.L.

1. There have been several errors in regard to the date of production. For instance, Ryan (*Table Talk*) and Busby (*Concert Room Anecdotes*) have Nov., 1727. A double-dated letter by Swift is apparently responsible. Croker (Hervey's *Memoirs*) seems the first to call attention to the source of such a mistake. See also note to p. 11.

1. *The Beggar's Opera* furnished a complete contrast to the preceding play at L.I.F., on Saturday, Jan. 27, advertised in the *Daily Journal* as "The last New Tragedy, call'd Sesostris: Or Royalty in Disguise."

2. John Rich (1682?-1761) acquired the unfinished theatre in Lincoln's Inn Fields when his father died in 1714. It was completed about the time of George

the First's coronation, and was patented by the new king. It was opened on Dec. 18, with *The Recruiting Officer.* Rich's new playhouse was the third and last to bear the name. The manager is best remembered for his production of *The Beggar's Opera.*

2. The interest of the Duchess did not end with her guarantee. Henry Angelo (*Reminiscences,* p. 25) says: "I remember Mrs. Skaites [an attendant] assuring me that the duchess and her friends went several nights in succession to a stage box in the theatre, to support the Beggar's Opera; and that the worthy spinster Skaites, and others of the household, were present at its representation more than twenty nights during the season it came upon the stage." No doubt it was on Gay's benefit nights that even the servants were presented with tickets to what probably became their favorite diversion.

4. Pearce (*Polly Peachum,* p. 91) says, "That which turned the scale in favour of the new venture is generally supposed to have been Polly's singing of the ballad wherein she appeals to her father (Act I, Scene viii)." There is no such song in the scene referred to, unless the writer has in mind the modern acting version, from which "for convenience" he quotes several passages in the same connection. The practice of citing a late, condensed edition in an explanation of the original performance seems hardly justifiable.

5. Wheatley (*Hogarth's London*) suggests that the orchestra on such an occasion in 1728 would not be large—consisting probably of only three or four fiddles, a hautboy, and an occasional drum.

5. Oxberry's anecdote is told by Pearce (*Polly Peachum*), but without any quoted authority. Chappell (*Popular Music,* II, 631) gives a slightly different account, naming Rich instead of Hall: "Down to the time of *The Beggar's Opera,* it had been the custom to perform three movements of instrumental music, termed 'first, second, and third music,' before the commencement of each play. A story is told of Rich, the manager, who when the customary music was called for by the audience at the first performance of *The Beggar's Opera,* came forward and said, 'Ladies and gentlemen, there is no *music* to an opera (setting the house in a roar of laughter),—I mean, ladies and gentlemen, an opera is all music.' "

5. "Hogarth's picture of *The Beggar's Opera* exhibits to us the audience on the stage, apparently very much in the way of the actors. This evil was not done away with altogether until Garrick made some of his chief improvements. . . ." Wheatley, *Hogarth's London,* p. 18. Wheatley says no other picture of the interior of the playhouse is known. This one shows that the fashionable patrons were confined in boxes or pews instead of occupying chairs or stools on the open stage.

5. Hogarth's picture is in the National Gallery, London, No. 2437. The players exhibited are (from left to right): Egleton, Hall, Walker, Fenton, and Hippisley, who are all represented by real portraits. The place in the play is Act III, Sc. xi. The principal persons supposed to be represented are: on the right, the Duke of Bolton, watching Polly intently, Major Paunceford, Sir Robert Fagg, M. P., Rich, the manager, Cock, the auctioneer, and Gay, in the

rear; on the left, Lady Jane Cook, Anthony Henley, Lord Gage, Sir Conyers d'Arcy, and Sir Thomas Robinson. Pope, Bolingbroke, and Arbuthnot are not shown, but Pope's account indicates that they occupied a box together. The Queensberrys and the Duke of Argyle are also missing.

5. Gilfillan (*Memoir* of Gay) draws a picture of the brilliant assemblage which is more vivid than correct. As Pearce points out (*Polly Peachum,* p. 87), Swift was not present, and Addison had been dead for several years, while Congreve, who was then feeble and blind, would very probably not attend. Molloy (*Famous Plays,* p. 87) gives a picturesque and interesting, though purely imaginative, description of the theatre, both outside and inside, on this occasion.

5. Some of the later newspapers have 2s. for gallery and 1s. for upper gallery.

5. Pearce (*Polly Peachum,* p. 127) says it is reported that Rich was paid as much as £60 during this year for newspaper advertisements, mostly relating to *The Beggar's Opera,* according to the custom of the day.

6. The second night was on Wednesday. Tuesday was an open night, though it is strange that there should be a gap between the first and second performances. Possibly the opera was withheld for slight revision; or Rich may have given his company a night off to celebrate.

6. The audience and the proceeds of the first night seem to have been considered exceptional. Since the advertising in advance was unattractive, and the nature of the piece could not be known except by hearsay, the name of the author must have been largely responsible.

6. My attention was first called to this quotation from the *Craftsman* by Mr. E. L. Gay. No doubt it contains the earliest use of the phrase which has been so many times repeated (in slightly varied form) that it has grown into a proverb for *The Beggar's Opera.* It is, besides, a remarkably early forecast of the profitable returns from the piece during the early runs and for many years after. The phrase was later usually inverted. Both Cibber and Dr. Johnson say "Gay rich and Rich gay." Such a play on words was common to the period. In the *Dublin Magazine: Or, the Gentleman's New Miscellany,* 1733, we find these lines,

> "I'm gently lambent while I'm Gay,
> But brightest when I'm Swift."

6. Along with the "full account," already quoted, Gay has these significant lines: "By constant attendance on this affair, I have almost worried myself into an ill state of health; but I intend in five or six days to go to our [Pope's] country-seat, at Twickenham, for a little air.

"I would write more, but as to-night is for my benefit, I am in a hurry, to go out about my business." For once, Gay, usually indolent and never aggressive, must have been wholly absorbed in the busy life created by the success of his recent experiment. His intentness on dramatic affairs is suggested further in a letter of Swift to Martha Blount, Feb. 29, 1728: "I wish you would bring Mr. Pope with you when you come, but we will leave Mr. Gay to his beggars and his operas till he is able to pay his club."

6. Pope was more sickly than usual during the period from Feb. to May, 1728, but his interest in his friend's success was constant.

7. Pope alludes to a letter of Nov. 23, 1727, in which Swift said to Gay, "Get a stronger fence about your thousand pounds."

7. The *Dunciad* note belongs to the 1729 ed. of Pope; Elwin credits it to the poet.

7. Many later authors give 63 nights, among them Victor (*Hist. of Theatres*), the writer of *Companion to Playhouse,* Henry Angelo (*Reminiscences*), Mrs. Inchbald (1808 ed.) and Gilfillan (*Memoir* of Gay). Some recent writers following the same mistake are: Lecky (*Hist. of England*), Molloy (*Famous Plays*), Oxenford (ed. of play), Wyndham (*Annals of C.G.*), Mrs. Parsons (*Garrick and His Circle*), and the author of the article on Rich in the *D.N.B.* Some of these also carry on the mistake of an uninterrupted run. Even Elwin and Courthope's ed. of Pope has an inconsistency as to the number of nights, in one place giving 62 (IV, 35) and in another 63 (VII, 114). Ezekiel Sanford (*Life of Gay*) has 60, and G. A. Aitken (*Westminster Review*) only 52. The author of the article on Lavinia Fenton in the *D.N.B.* says the play had an uninterrupted run until March 9. This is not correct, for there were no performances of Gay's piece on March 6, 8, and 9. March 11 was the next date of acting.

8. Rich's account book was purchased by Mr. E. L. Gay, of Boston, who made it available for this investigation.

9. As early as March 16, *Mist's Weekly Journal* contained this item: "We hear that the late Mr. Farquhar's Comedy of Love and a Bottle is reviving at the new Play House, for the Benefit of Captain Macheath; two of his favourite Wives will sing upon that occasion, and gentle Polly Peach'em is to wear the Breeches." The names of the characters were often used thus in the months succeeding the familiar impression made on the public mind. The *Daily Journal,* May 16, speaks of Chapman, whose benefit is advertised, as "The Poet in the *Beggar's Opera.*" In *Mist's Weekly Journal,* April 20, we read: "For the Benefit of Lockit and his Daughter Lucy. By the Company of Comedians, At the Theatre Royal in Lincoln's Inn Fields on Wednesday the 24th of April will be presented, the 2nd Part of the comic History of Don Quixot." Miss Fenton is listed for the part of Marcella.

9. The idea of "uninterrupted except for the benefits" may be responsible for the currency of the statement about consecutive nights.

9. Pearce (*Polly Peachum,* p. 193) quotes from R. J. Smith's record regarding a benefit which was apparently for the manager himself: "March 26. *The Beggar's Opera* for the benefit of Mr. John Rich, on the thirty-eighth night. £184, 15s." He says this could not have been for Rich's brother, who was named Christopher.

9. The biography of Lavinia Fenton (1728) tells how the manager "on the *Saturday* following gave her a Benefit again, when the *Beggar's Opera* was acted with great Applause before a crouded Audience, and *Polly* exerted herself so

far, that the Claps of her officious Friends were so frequent and loud, that it took off the Beauty of the Performance."

10. Genest says May 4 was the forty-seventh time (followed by the *D.N.B.*); but Rich's account book, as well as the *Daily Journal,* shows that the forty-seventh night was on Wednesday, May 1.

10. Pearce (*Polly Peachum,* p. 132) mentions these two newspaper notices, but he gives only fragments and makes his quotations appear to refer to a Dublin performance of Mrs. Barbier as Polly. On Feb. 24, however, she was plainly still with the company in London, for the advertisements read "in Lincoln's-Inn-Fields." Pearce speculates on the rights of Dublin managers and Rich's prompt setback of this particular case of presumption; but the point is lost when we see that the notice was purely local, and that Mrs. Barbier's real Irish benefit, as Pearce himself states (p. 134), was not till April 11, after she had apparently left London for her Dublin engagements. Pearce tries to prove, by a ballad to the Irish Polly (mentioned in this volume), that in spite of the manager's ruling Mrs. Barbier had her benefit anyway on April 11; but it is certain that Rich did put a stop to her London performance of March 16. A few lines of the ballad on the Dublin benefit may refer to the fancied slights by Rich in London:

"Had *Polly* toy'd and Kiss'd
A Benefit she'd miss'd,
But *Virtue,* which so Long *was Hist,*
Is justly now Requited."

11. Gay's piece outdistanced *Cato,* even though, as Johnson said (life of Addison), "The play . . . was acted night after night for a longer time than, I believe, the publick had allowed to any drama before."

11. The record of Fielding's piece was 50 nights, a pace that must have been set by *The Beggar's Opera.*

11. Sheridan had profited by the experience of a long line of comic operas, and besides had Linley to furnish the music, as well as the assistance of men like Jackson and Harrington. Yet *The Duenna* is now the least known, almost, of Sheridan's plays, while *The Beggar's Opera* keeps Gay in the foreground of early eighteenth-century dramatists.

11. The date of 1727 in the *Life of Quin* can hardly be taken as a mistake, owing to the writing of dates under the old system, like 1727/8. Such authors as the compiler of *Companion to Playhouse,* Victor (*Hist. of Theatres,* II, 75), and Wilkes (*General View of Stage,* p. 311) have 1727. Modern writers, however, should make a close distinction between these years, for fear of misunderstanding. Many have fallen into this trap. Even Pearce, one of the most recent writers on *The Beggar's Opera,* in his own contention about the previous misstatements on this point, does not seem to consider, at all, the probable idea that these variations are due to the old counting of dates, thus causing Jan. 29, 1727/8, to be generally spoken of as being in 1727. (See *Polly Peachum,* pp. 83, 183, 184, and 187.) He suggests, instead, the dating of the theatrical season, 1727-28, which is surely not to blame.

11. The *D.N.B.* (article on Rich) says that in his theatrical enterprises in general the manager does not appear to have been financially successful.

12. No doubt the income from the publication of *Polly* has been confused with the proceeds of *The Beggar's Opera*. Spence is followed by Gilfillan and others as to the £400.

12. Underhill (Muses' Library ed.) says that Gay's part of the proceeds, with the sale of the copyright for 90 guineas, brought him nearly £800. This copyright assignment, however, included the *Fables,* and hence the exact amount of returns from the play publication cannot be computed.

12. That Gay made quick use of his prosperity is certain. Mrs. Martha Blount wrote to Swift on May 7: "Mr. Gay's fame continues, but his riches are in a fair way of diminishing. He is gone to Bath." Swift, in a gossiping letter to Pope on July 16, said: "I suppose Mr. Gay will return from the Bath with twenty pounds more flesh, and two hundred less in money. Providence never designed him to be above two-and-twenty, by his thoughtlessness and cullibility. He has as little foresight of age, sickness, poverty, or loss of admirers, as a girl at fifteen."

12. Underhill gives the receipts of Gay's four benefits as £693, 13s. 6d. Rich's book shows £633, 3s. 6d., not counting card tickets. The separate items are: third, £143, 17s. 6d.; sixth, £173, 11s.; ninth, £153, 7s.; and fifteenth, £162, 8s. Ryan (*Table Talk,* I, 254-255) presents figures for Gay's benefit nights, as well as certain other selected performances. Some of his amounts do not square with those in the treasurer's official ledger, but it is an evidence of the sensation of the original run of *The Beggar's Opera* that any such statistics of the early proceeds have thus been preserved. We may search in vain for similar information about other plays in general dramatic history or biography.

12. Pearce adds the proceeds of the eighteenth night £163, 16s. 6d., to the total of £693, 13s. 6d., making £857, 10s. (*Polly Peachum,* p. 192.)

12. Dr. Doran, commenting on the epigram about Gay's good fortune, says he profited "sufficiently so to make him forego earning a fee of twenty guineas by a dedication." (*Annals of Stage,* p. 262.)

12. Hitchcock (*Irish Stage,* I, 39), speculating on the unlucky rejection of the piece, the error in judgment of actors like Wilks and Booth, who thought the opera would be a failure, and the later enormous success, says: "His [Gay's] former eminent productions, joined to his amiable character in private life, had secured him the friendship of the most distinguished writers of the age. Under these circumstances, and with such intrinsic merit as the Beggar's Opera is allowed to possess, it might naturally be expected to have met with that reception which it afterwards so warmly experienced."

14. Many of Pearce's own statements are so inconsistent with his general proposition that they serve as arguments on the other side. See pp. 132, 195-196, 233, 287, 304, 310, 344, 347.

14. It is interesting to note that at the time of the death of the Duchess of Bolton (Lavinia Fenton), in Jan., 1760, Gay's opera was supporting another Polly, who sang with new applause the old songs of 1728. See *ante,* p. 67.

Davies (*Life of Garrick,* II, 64 ff.) says: "Of all the entertainments of the stage, none has been so perpetually serviceable to the players as Gay's Beggar's Opera. A new Polly, or a new Macheath, has successively given such a spirit and lustre to that humorous dramatick satire, that the publick has often run in crowds to see it, for twenty or thirty nights successively."

15. If we may believe genuine the following anecdote, printed in *Polly Peachum's Jests* (April, 1728), Cibber was a visitor back of the curtain at the Fields before the first edition of the play was published. "The other Night his Grace the Duke of A—— [Argyle] being at the *Beggar's Opera,* who says more good Things than any-body, met C—bb—r there, behind the Scenes; well, Colley, said he, how do you like the *Beggar's Opera.* Why it makes one laugh, my Lord, said he, upon the Stage, but how will it do in print. O very well, by G—d, reply'd the Duke, *if you don't write the Preface;* alluding, I suppose, to the *Paraphanalia,* and some other pretty Things in his own."

15. Watts issued the first edition on the day of the fourteenth performance, which indicates the sudden demand (or opportunity) for the piece in print. Since that time the stage success has been steadily followed by the periodic appearance of the book. The many new editions have only kept pace with the frequent performances and revivals in nearly every decade since 1728.

15. It is even thought that the appearance of Pope's *Dunciad* was intentionally delayed on account of the unusual popularity of Gay's piece and the literary comment it occasioned. (Elwin, ed. of Pope, IV, 35.)

16. Dr. Doran (*Annals of Stage,* I, 265) says that when Booth was stricken past recovery "all the mirth caused by the Beggar's Opera could not make his own peculiar public forget him."

17. Hartshorne (*Memoirs of a Royal Chaplain,* p. 123) says that both portraits and songs were reproduced "long after Gay's death, upon the flat circular table snuff-boxes called 'Turgotines' after the minister." For another reference to fans and snuff-boxes, see *ante,* p. 235.

19. Mr. E. L. Gay possessed a complete set of these cards, the only one I have found.

19. This was not the first time such illustrations had been used on playing cards. There had been others (historical, satirical, etc.) during the latter part of the seventeenth century and the first quarter of the eighteenth. The catalogue of playing cards in the B.M. shows, among others, these quaint items: last quarter seventeenth century, chief events connected with the Spanish Armada; last quarter seventeenth century (1679?), events connected with Popish Plot; about 1700, humorous engravings, illustrating proverbs; 1710, events in career of Dr. Sacheverell (couplets below each design); 1720, satirical engravings on bubble companies, with verses; *c.* 1720, geographical information, with pictorial illustrations of real rulers; first quarter eighteenth century, Marlborough's victories, with verses; second quarter eighteenth century, another set of musical cards, with miscellaneous verses and airs.

19. The Macheath pamphlet, unlike the current life of Polly Peachum, seems to have no reference to the actor behind the part. It goes back of the play, as if

to bring it up to date, correcting the abuses and false interpretations of the dramatist.

Chapter II

22. Even little incidents of the original season have been preserved. One good example is the following bit of verse, which has grown into an English nursery rhyme:

"Lucy Locket lost her pocket;
Kitty Fisher found it;
But ne'er a penny was there in't
Except the binding round it."

23. For a full account of the life of Lavinia Fenton (1708-1760) see Pearce's *Polly Peachum.* The book, however, takes much of its information from the *Life,* published in 1728, enlarging upon the brief facts given there. According to this *Life,* Lavinia was nobody's daughter (*i.e.,* of Lieutenant Beswick and Mrs. Fenton, a keeper of a coffeehouse). She attended a boarding school for a time, and after various amours began to think of the stage in 1725. Her first appearance, according to the *Life,* was at the Hay., in *The Orphan,* for Huddy's benefit, in March, 1726. (Pearce declares that it was Feb. 24, 1726; and he also corrects Cooke's statement that her début was in Monimia, instead of Serina, in *The Orphan.*) Her advancement from selling oranges in the theatre and singing ballads in her mother's coffeehouse had been pronounced. She was then little known except as a charming young woman of spirit. Rich drew her from the Hay. to L.I.F. by the attractive offer of 15s. a week. (This price is mentioned in the *Life.*) There she first acted in D'Avenant's *The Man's the Master,* on July 15, 1726, as Lucilla. Ryan is mistaken in saying Rich got her from the Hay. in 1728. Baker (*English Actors,* I, 116) says her first regular engagement was with Rich. A bit of interesting information about her before 1728 is given in the *Life of Quin,* p. 19: "Soon after Quin came upon the stage, a duel was fought in Hyde Park for an actress, the only duel upon record, that ever was fought for an actress; but this is not astonishing when it is known that it was for no less a personage than the (afterwards) celebrated Polly Peachum—she who could captivate the great and intrepid soul of Captain Macheath and vanquish the pride and honour of the D—— of B——, who entitled her to figure to the end of her days as a D——."

23. Pearce (*Polly Peachum,* p. 198) doubts the prices of 15s. and 30s., because of the payment by season, with account taken only for acting nights. The salaries this writer gives (p. 197) for 1735-36 do seem suddenly large in comparison with Fenton's for 1728. Other writers, however, accept the story of 15s. and the increase to 30s. Cooke says 30s. was the average price of a first-rate singer in 1728—£45 a year. He contrasts this with the £3,000 and a clear benefit which a first-rate singer got in 1801. (*Memoirs of Macklin,* pp. 44-45.) The *Life* says the 30s. came after Fenton's fame in *The Beggar's Opera.*

23. Pearce (*Polly Peachum,* pp. 194-195) calls attention to the apparent

dissatisfaction of Fenton with the eternal designation of Polly, and the change (possibly at her request) in some of the playbills from Polly Peachum to Fenton, as if for a little personal glory aside from the character part of Gay's piece.

24. Gay wrote to Swift, on July 6, 1728, "The Duke of Bolton has run away with Polly Peachum, having settled four hundred per year on her during pleasure, and, upon disagreement, two hundred more." He married her twenty-three years later, in 1751. She survived him by several years. Dr. Warton comments on her good qualities in later life,—her wit, conversational ability, good taste, and agreeable nature.

24. Fenton, says Pearce, was really the first low-born actress to be ennobled. But the "Polly peerage" did not end there. At least four other exponents of the part married members of the nobility: Miss Norsa (Lord Orford), Miss Bolton (Lord Thurlow), Miss Stephens (Earl of Essex), and Miss Paton (Lord Lennox). Miss Warren, the second regular Polly, was taken from the stage by a gentleman of fortune. Kirkman (*Life of Macklin,* I, 345 ff.) says of the part of Polly, "No character in the drama has furnished so many young adventurers as this, several of whom have made ample provision for themselves, through her introduction into life."

24. Oxberry's *Dram. Biog.,* V, 266, says that later, when still his mistress, Fenton "in consequence of a quarrel, was dismissed by him; but, unwilling to lose his affection, she bethought herself of a scheme, as a last resource, to work upon his feelings, and bind him to her once again. She dressed herself in the habit of his favourite Polly, and standing before him in all the grace and simplicity of the character, spread her arms—*Oh, what pain it is to part!* This stratagem had the desired effect—the heart of the duke melted in a moment, and he took her to his arms, no longer to be his mistress, but his wife." Pearce (*Polly Peachum,* p. 303) gives a variant story, quoting Leigh Hunt without knowing that writer's source.

24. Perhaps Fenton withdrew from the theatre at the proper time, when her glory was at its height. Her prestige might not have been sustained in new dramatic rôles.

24. It is surprising to find this statement of Pearce (*Polly Peachum,* p. 204): "It is somewhat odd that throughout the volume [the *Life* of Fenton] *The Beggar's Opera* is never once mentioned by name." It is mentioned twice in the quotations given here, and several other times in the pamphlet. He himself contradicts his own statement when he prints the same passages on p. 220 of his work.

25. The *Craftsman,* April 7, 1728, has notice of a race between John Thompson's Polly Peachum and Mr. Tarrant's Lucy Lockit; the latter horse won the first heat, the former the second and the third, and therefore the plate. The *Post,* July 31, 1729, tells of Sir E. O'Brion's Polly Peachum, which raced for the town plate at Stratford, July 23, 1729. (References from Mr. E. L. Gay.)

25. During July, 1727, the *Craftsman* advertised "A Curious Metzotinto Print of Signieur Senesino."

26. Even the contemporary narrator of a dream has to confess that he "was

waked, by the bawling of a Wench in the Streets, calling out, A Hue and Cry after Polly Peachum."—*Mist's Weekly Journal,* June 29, 1728.

26. The players mentioned in the poem represented the legitimate drama, which, as well as Italian opera, was directly rivaled by *The Beggar's Opera.*

28. When printed in the *Twickenham Hotch-Potch* the footnote to the poem was changed to read: "A mighty weak sucking Priest, who to show his Theological Capacity, preached a Sermon at *Lincoln's-Inn*-Chapel against the *Deism* of the Age, and the *Beggar's Opera.*" See Chapter XXI.

29. Warren did become Fenton's regular successor when L.I.F. began the next season.

33. The "Song on Polly Peachum" also appeared in sheet music form (B.M. copy assigned to 1728). Many song collections reprinted it. See *Merry Companion,* 1742, *Orpheus* (*Thrush*), 1749, and *Charmer,* 1752.

34. "To *Soisson* our *Polly's* gone," with the Duke of Bolton. A European congress was held there in 1728. "There is a rumour that Polly Peachum is gone to attend the Congress at Soissons, where it is thought, she will make as good a figure, and do her Country as much Service, as several others that shall be nameless."—*Mist's Weekly Journal,* June 29, 1728. This version of the ballad must have been written after June 19, Fenton's last time on the stage. See *ante,* p. 39.

35. A different version of "A Song in Praise of Polly" is printed by Pearce (*Polly Peachum,* p. 145), from a single-sheet copy called "The Amorous Lover." The one here is found in *Vocal Miscellany* (1734), *Complete Collection* (1735), and *Orpheus* (*Robin*), 1749.

35. "The Prudential Lover" is copied in *Bacchanalian Songs* (1729), *Complete Collection* (1735), *Merry Companion* (1742), *Goldfinch* (1748), and *Orpheus* (*Robin*), 1749.

36. Thomas Walker (1698-1744) was an actor whom Booth had found playing in a droll at Southwark Fair and secured for D.L. In Giffard's company he became, it is said, the finest Faulconbridge. He was still a young man when he entered the *Beggar's Opera* cast. He had previously been playing tragic parts, the latest being Macbeth. As Massaniello, in an adaptation of D'Urfey's drama, he had become well known at L.I.F. In 1728, after the run of *The Beggar's Opera,* Walker introduced his imitation, *The Quaker's Opera,* at Bartholomew Fair. In 1730 was produced his *The Fate of Villainy,* for which he received £31. Later on he undertook to alter some of D'Urfey's works. Meanwhile his stray performances in *The Beggar's Opera,* including his benefits, continued for several years. According to many writers, his success in *The Beggar's Opera,* which gave him his greatest reputation, ruined him, for he became intemperate and, in the end, almost useless for the stage. It was probably drinking that spoilt his memory. During the original run he apparently was led into much fashionable dissipation by the crowd of admirers of the gay Macheath. As a member of many clubs, he entertained with his humor and shortened his life. Cooke (*Memoirs of Macklin,* pp. 30-31) says he was often under the necessity of eating sandwiches (then anchovy toasts) behind the scenes to hide the fumes of

liquor. Cooke also tells of his discharge at C.G. on account of repeated dissipation, and of his death, in poverty, at Dublin in the forty-sixth year of his age. *The Beggar's Opera* was then still going merrily along at both C.G. and D.L.

36. The idea of Quin's dislike for the part is borne out even by the *Life of Quin,* but there are other statements on this point which conflict. Cooke (*Memoirs of Macklin,* p. 27) says Quin "barely sung well enough to give a convivial song in company, which, at that time of day, was an almost indispensable claim on every performer; and on this account, perhaps, did not much relish the business." On the other hand, Davies says, "He had so happy an ear for music, and was so famous for singing with ease a common ballad or catch, that Gay was persuaded to offer him the part of Macheath." Genest says Quin sang well.

37. Quin finally played Macheath, at his benefit on March 19, 1730.

37. By "hero" Cooke means the leading character in the droll from which Booth transferred Walker to L.I.F.

37. The *Thespian Dict.* says of Walker that "though not proficient in music, he supported his singing by so much expression of countenance and inimitable action, as rendered his Macheath a great favourite with the public." Davies says, "He knew little scientifically of music, other than singing a song in good ballad tune; but that singing was supported by a speaking eye, and inimitable action." Jackson (*Scottish Stage,* p. 360, note) says, "His admired excellence was in suiting the action to the airs." The writer of the supplement to the *Life of Quin* (p. 78) says, "From the offer of the part of Macheath to Quin, and the choice afterwards of Walker, it is evident that it was not thought necessary that the performer should be a first-rate singer."

Chapter III

38. Gay adds this interesting comment: "I have sent by Dr. Delany the Opera, Polly Peachum and Captain Macheath [in prints]. I would have sent my own head (which is now engraving) to make up the Gang, but it is not yet finished."

38. Rich had no control over these performances outside of London, such as the Dublin run. Dramatic rights in 1728 were not considered, and wherever the play could reach, an independent prompt-book was established.

39. The people of Bath gave the company playing there a set of costumes for the sake of improving their entertainment.

39. At Bristol Gay obtained the consent of the Mayor, Henry Nash, to erect a theatrical booth in Bridewell Lane.

40. The copy mentioned by Swift must have been the first Dublin ed.

41. Mrs. Delany (*Corresp.,* I, 310) quotes from Dr. Walsh's *History of Dublin* regarding the establishment of Madame Violante's theatre in Ireland, with a company of children, in 1731. The mistake is somewhat curious in view of the statement of Dr. Walsh that "the 'Beggar's Opera' was first introduced to the notice of a Dublin audience by these infants," and of the fact that the regular comedians of Dublin were playing the piece early in 1728. Dr. Doran speaks

of Madame Violante's Dublin performance of *The Beggar's Opera* in 1727. He is followed by W. D. Adams in *Dict. of Drama.* Unless this is an oversight due to the double counting of dates, both writers have the Lilliputians playing the piece before it was ever written.

41. Madame Violante did not meet the success she expected from her first experiment and changed her booth into a playhouse. (Wilkes, *General View of Stage,* p. 309.) She was an Italian woman (Cooke says French) who had performed on the rope in London in 1726-27.

42. "In such parts as Lucy, in Fielding's 'Virgin Unmask'd,' Steele's Phillis, and Gay's Polly, she [Woffington] began to grow popular as an actress, in spite of a bad voice."—Matthews and Hutton's *Actors and Actresses,* p. 105. Lewes (*Memoirs,* II, 13) tells how Thomas Elrington, manager of Aungier-street house, gave Peg, though hardly thirteen, many women characters, including Mrs. Peachum, which required humor in acting. Mrs. Delany (*Corresp.,* I, 310), talking of the enthusiastic reception of Peg as Polly, says she "became the prop of the Booth Theatre, at a salary of 30s. per week." The *Thespian Dict.* says, "A commencement so favourable got her an engagement a few years afterwards at Smock Alley Theatre, Dublin."

42. Cooke is certainly wrong in saying (*Memoirs of Macklin,* p. 123) that Peg Woffington was fixed upon by Madame Violante "as her Macheath; and such was the power of her infant talents, not a little perhaps aided by the partialities in favour of the opera, that the Lilliputian Theatre was crowded every night, and the spirit and address of the little hero the theme of every theatrical conversation." He is perhaps confusing this Dublin performance with that of the Hay. in 1732. See *ante,* p. 50. Of course it is possible that Woffington took Macheath at some time during the Dublin juvenile run.

42. In another place (X, 296) Genest says Woffington was under ten years. Cooke and Jackson say she was in her tenth year. Mrs. Parsons (*Garrick and His Circle,* p. 49) has eleven years.

Chapter IV

43. Both Cooke (*Memoirs of Macklin,* pp. 61-62) and Ryan (*Table Talk,* III, 43) relate the following anecdote. Ryan's version is somewhat better told: "At the seventy-second performance of 'The Beggar's Opera,' during its original run [second season], Walker, who played *Macheath,* being rather imperfect in his part, Rich, the manager, observed, 'How's this, Mister Walker? I thought you had a pretty strong memory.' —— 'So I have,' replied the actor; 'but you can't expect it to last for ever.'"

43. Miss Warren was the sister of the well-known Mrs. Mapp, the bone-setter of Epsom. She was called Polly Peachum in the newspapers, just as Fenton was. See *Grubstreet Journal,* Dec. 16, 1736. The *Weekly Miscellany,* Aug. 7, 1736, speaks of Mrs. Mapp as "sister to that Polly Peach-'em, whom a Gentleman of Fortune marry'd." Miss Warren, as a member of the L.I.F. company during the first run of *The Beggar's Opera,* had a benefit on May 8. She seems to have been trained directly for Fenton's successor.

43. Pearce (*Polly Peachum,* p. 233), partially to prove that Warren could not draw the crowds of Fenton, gives various receipts as follows: Sept. 20, £75, 7s.; end of Nov., a drop to £23; Dec. 11, £112, 9s. 6d.; average receipts during season, £70 a night. He says that up to the end of the year the piece was acted "nineteen times in addition to the sixty-two nights ending June 19—besides the performances at the New Theatre in the Haymarket on November 30 and December 30, when a Mrs. Pullin was Polly." (Mrs. Pullin's appearances are here correctly placed in 1728, not 1729, as recorded by the same author in the appendix, p. 365.) But he does not include the Hay. performances of July 3 and 8, among several others there, as announced, and Nov. 8, with Miss Petre as Polly, in her first appearance on the stage.

44. Needham (in *London Society,* 50:14, no authority cited) says that at this New Year's performance a book of the songs was sent by a flying Cupid across the stage to the Prince.

44. Ryan (*Table Talk*) has fifteen nights for the Lilliputians. He is followed by Pearce (*Polly Peachum,* p. 241).

44. For a similar Lilliputian cast in 1737-38, see Genest, III, 523.

44. Pearce (*Polly Peachum,* p. 240) has £116, 11s. for the first night, £69, 1s. for the second, and £118, 14s. for the fifth, by command of the Prince of Wales.

44. Royalty and nobility continued to patronize *The Beggar's Opera.* Pearce (*Polly Peachum*) has May 21, 1729 (forty-third time by the regular comedians), by command of the Prince of Wales, and Dec. 17, 1729, bespoken by the Duchess of Richmond, when the proceeds were £106, 7s. 6d. Kings and queens saw *The Beggar's Opera* a good many times during its history.

45. Regarding the children's performance Genest says (III, 239): "If I am not greatly mistaken, I many years ago saw an edition of the Beggar's Opera as acted by children, with Woodward's name to one of the characters —— in the Thespian Dictionary he is said to have acted Peachum at this time with great success." Of course, the copy he meant was the issue of the first ed. mentioned here, though Woodward's name is not down for Peachum. Genest's memory was quite right, while the *Thespian Dict.* may be wrong in recording the facts. Henry Woodward later became prominent on the stage, as did several of the others.

45. The doubling of the characters by Weeks seems improbable, since both are in Macheath's gang at the same time.

45. Pearce (*Polly Peachum,* p. 241) says the performance of May 21 was the last till December 17; but one on Oct. 1, at L.I.F., is recorded by Genest.

46. "The Beggar's Opera Dissected" was advertised in *Fog's Weekly Journal,* April 5, 1729, and in the *Monthly Chronicle,* April, 1729.

Chapter V

48. On p. 241 of *Polly Peachum* Pearce gives the same figures for Quin's proceeds, while on p. 198 he gives R. J. Smith's figures of £113, 13s. 6d. (of which £93, 16s. were from tickets) without trying to reconcile the two accounts, or calling attention to the conflict.

48. It seems curious to learn that during the season of 1732-33, at C.G., Quin performed the singing part of Lycomedes, in Gay's opera of *Achilles,* for eighteen nights. (*Life of Quin,* Supplement, p. 79.)

49. The Duke of Wharton's letter, dated May 10, 1730, may be found in "An Useful and Entertaining Collection of Letters upon Various Subjects," London, 1745, pp. 29-31.

49. Allusions under names in *The Beggar's Opera* are often found. The *Craftsman,* Jan. 29, 1738, has an advertisement of "A letter from Mrs. Jane Jones, alias *Jenny Diver,* in Drury-Lane, to Mrs. Arabella B—ow—l—s. Sold by A. Dodd."

49. Pearce (*Polly Peachum,* p. 241) says the play was revived at intervals in 1731, drawing an average of £45.

50. Pearce (*Polly Peachum,* p. 241) says that "in 1732, the year of Rich's removal to Covent Garden, it [*The Beggar's Opera*] does not seem to have been played at Lincoln's Inn Fields." He seems to think Rich's preparations for moving were responsible for the gap in *Beggar's Opera* performances. Genest, however, records a performance there on Feb. 21, 1732, and Pearce has instances (p. 198) of two benefits in March and May.

50. Pearce (*Polly Peachum,* p. 241) says *The Beggar's Opera* was selected for the opening night at C.G., Dec. 6, 1732. But Wyndham, writing the *Annals of C.G.* (I, 30) says that "on December 6, 1732, the theatre opened with a modest revival of Congreve's *Way of the World.*" The *Life of Quin* says C.G. opened on Dec. 7.

50. The C.G. performance appears to have been the first one in London away from L.I.F., except for the summer productions at the Hay.

50. The *D.N.B.* (under Rich) says that when *The Beggar's Opera* was revived at C.G. it proved so successful that the regular company went back to L.I.F. and did not return until Jan. 11, 1733.

51. It is a striking fact that between Gay's death on Nov. 4 and his funeral on Dec. 23 *The Beggar's Opera* was making a new record for itself.

51. Miss Norsa was later taken from the stage by Lord Orford, the brother of Horace Walpole.

51. "The long note on the Beggar's Opera is a pleasing proof of Pope's real affection for Gay, and of his freedom from petty jealousy where his friends were concerned."—Elwin, ed. of Pope, IV, 351, note.

52. According to a letter in the *Prompter,* March 25, 1735, *Macheath in the Shades* was by Philipps.

53. Walker also played Macheath for his benefit on May 17, 1740, at D.L., and on May 27, 1742, at Goodman's Fields.

53. *The Beggar's Opera* and *The Devil to Pay* were again played together on March 18, 1754, in N. Y.

53. The earliest companion piece to *The Beggar's Opera* of which I have any record was *The Tavern Bilkers,* May 21, 1729. In later years there was often a double bill, farces usually being introduced. On Jan. 5, 1752, at D.L., two of Gay's works were run together, *The Beggar's Opera* and *The What d'ye Call It.*

Chapter VI

55. According to Pearce (*Polly Peachum*, pp. 255-256) Mrs. Clive played Polly, without any particular notice, for a single night, Sept. 12, 1732, probably by special arrangement.

55. The play does seem to have been withheld for some reason. On Dec. 31, 1736, when *The Beggar's Opera* was played at D.L., a newspaper notice (B.M. cuttings relating to D.L.) said "Not acted these three years." The bill for Jan. 1, 1737, said, "Acted but once these three years." The controversy probably did have its effect.

56. According to the *Grubstreet Journal* the foreign disputants, whose simultaneous quarrel was a coincidence, were Mademoiselles Petit and St. Germain.

58. Dr. Johnson once said that Mrs. Clive was the best player he ever saw. Cooke (*Memoirs of Macklin*, p. 58) says "Mrs. Cibber was to the eye, heart, and ear, all that the Poet could wish for: the simplicity of her tones, and the sensibility of her countenance, engaged every auditor in her favour." After this controversy she acted Polly often, as in Ireland in 1742, "successfully until the novelty wore off" (Molloy's *Irish Stage*, I, 130); three times at C.G. in 1745-46, though not regularly engaged (Genest); and on Dec. 11, 1746, and Apr. 21, 1747.

58. At D.L. on Dec. 12 and 13, 1747, and on Oct. 15, 1748, Mrs. Cibber played Polly, and Mrs. Clive appeared as Lucy. Mrs. Clive did not directly resign her favorite part (which she had acted, since the contest, in 1737, 1738, 1740, 1742, and 1744)—that would have been too much satisfaction—but gave it up to Miss Edwards, while she took Lucy; she now found herself, naturally and peaceably enough, playing Lucy with Miss Edward's successor. Later on Mrs. Clive played Polly, as on Dec. 27, 1749. Her last appearance in *The Beggar's Opera* seems to have been as Lucy, on Sept. 21, 1762.

59. Genest (III, 507-511) devotes several pages to a description of *The Beggar's Pantomime*, now rare; his own copy of the third ed., London, 1736, in the Yale Library, has been used in the preparation of this chapter. The title reads: "The Beggar's Pantomime, Or, The Contending Columbines: with New Songs, and several Alterations and Additions; Particularly, A Sequel to the Contention, call'd Pistol in Mourning, As they are perform'd at the Theatre-Royal in Lincoln's-Inn-Fields. Dedicated to Mrs. Clive and Mrs. Cibber. By Mr. Lun, Junior." It is an 8vo pamphlet of 24 pages, 18 of text. The fact that there were three eds. by the end of 1736 shows the prominence of this professional spat. The *Biog. Dram.* has two items, "The Beggar's Pantomime; or, *Contending Pollys*. Farce," and "The Beggar's Pantomime; or *The Contending Columbines*. Int. [erlude] intermixed with ballad songs," with a note that they are probably the same piece. The *New Theatrical Dict.* also calls it an interlude. The *Companion to Playhouse* says that it was acted at D.L., and that it must have been performed about 1730, two obvious mistakes. Genest (III, 514) also mentions a musical trifle, *The Mad-house*, by Baker, which refers to Gay's piece and the Clive-Cibber controversy.

59. Genest had no record of a performance earlier than Jan. 3, 1737, but he

naturally suspected (and says so) that the piece was brought out before, because the third ed. was printed in 1736.

59. At the Surrey Theatre, in Elliston's time, there was some contention over a female part between Miss Giroux and Miss Taylor. Elliston, who preferred Taylor, got up a pantomime, *The Rival Columbines,* in which they both appeared. See Oxberry's *Dram. Biog.,* III, 80-81.

59. Pearce (*Polly Peachum,* p. 270) says Rich first advertised the piece only as "with Polly and Lucy," not giving a full cast till Dec. 8. He also says that Genest, while apparently owning a copy of *The Beggar's Pantomime,* did not have before him all the particulars of the stage production. The truth is that Genest owned the third ed., now in the Yale Library, and gave merely the principal characters from the list printed there. Pearce also accuses Genest of saying that the part of Pistol, which the former declares had not yet been thought of, was omitted. As a matter of fact, Genest says, "The part of Pistol is omitted in the Dramatis Personae," a correct statement. The third ed., owned by Genest, has the character of Pistol in the main play, as well as in the addition of "Pistol in Mourning," appended to this text. Pearce himself had no copy of *The Beggar's Pantomime;* he says it was not in the B.M., and he has fallen back on Genest for all of his information regarding the actual contents, guessing as to its further nature. His newspaper cast does vary from Genest's and that of the third ed., but each may be correct, representing changes in the course of the performances.

Chapter VII

63. Pearce (*Polly Peachum,* pp. 276-277) features the Goodman's Fields performances, but he has "thirty nights," which would have been impossible for the period he maps out, between Dec. 31 and Jan. 15, when the piece gave place to *The Winter's Tale.*

63. According to Nichols (*Anecdotes of Hogarth*) Mrs. Careless was perhaps painted in Hogarth's *Marriage à la Mode,* and was mentioned in Fielding's *Amelia,* Book I, Chapter 6.

64. Pearce (*Polly Peachum,* p. 266) has Dec. 14, 15, and 16 for Mrs. Cibber, but those dates do not correspond with Genest's, from the *General Advertiser.*

65. In his reference to Hallam's nationality Patu is not corrected by Hedgcock (*Garrick and His French Friends,* p. 107, note), but Ryan (see *ante,* p. 244) speaks of Hallam as a patriotic Englishman. There is no account of the man's life in the *D.N.B.*

65. I have not been able to locate an eighteenth-century performance of *The Beggar's Opera* in Paris, but Ryan, writing in 1825 (*Table Talk,* III, 206), says, "This favourite piece, about thirty years ago, was translated into French, and successfully performed at Paris." If he meant Hallam's version, it must have been more than "thirty years ago." If his note is correct, the time would be about 1795, forty-five years after Hallam, insulted, returned to England. This could hardly be a reference to the translation of Patu, which was printed in London in 1756, for readers in Paris.

66. Cooke (*Memoirs of Macklin*) says Wilder was the best Macheath since Walker, though little known in 1804.

67. The manager of C.G. in 1759 was a son of the John Rich who first produced *The Beggar's Opera* at L.I.F.

67. Wyndham (*Annals of C.G.*, I, 136) says "thirty-seven nights in succession, with the exception of one night, March 10, on which a feeble farce, partly written by Rich himself, entitled *The Spirit of Contradiction*, was played for the first and last time." This is surely wrong, because the run of 37 nights began on Oct. 10, and was interrupted by the performance of *Douglas*, on Nov. 23.

67. Mrs. Parsons (*Garrick and His Circle*, p. 184) has 52 nights in 1759 (1759-60?).

67. Nancy Dawson danced a hornpipe in *The Beggar's Opera*, and seems to have attracted almost as much attention as the piece in which she took part. Wyndham says she was twenty-nine years old at this time. According to the *Monthly Mirror*, she appeared on the third night of the run. Pearce (*Polly Peachum*, p. 289) has Oct. 15, which would be the fifth night. As to hornpipes in *The Beggar's Opera*, they were often introduced, presumably in Act III, to judge by some newspaper notices and the contemporary printed versions of the music. Aside from hornpipes, before and after this period, entertainments of dancing between the acts and at the end of the play were often advertised in the newspapers. Hitchcock (*Irish Stage*) says that a "Signior Lucca Fabiano, a dancer, made his appearance after the Beggar's Opera early in the season," 1759.

68. The newspapers of the season of 1760-61 are full of references to the contending Pollies. The *London Chronicle*, Sept. 16, 1760, says: "There is likely to be as warm a contest between *The Beggar's Opera* at both houses as there was some years ago with the two Romeos."

68. Churchill's editor calls this praise of Vincent excessive, hinting that sweetness of disposition has been taken for talent in acting. *Rosciad*, Lowe's ed., p. 36.

69. In the same number of the *Public Ledger* Goldsmith says, "Two singing women, like heralds, have begun the contest; the whole town is divided on this solemn occasion." In Letter LXXXV he humorously complains, "They are not only determined to sing at each other till the end of the season, but, what is worse, to sing the same song; and, what is still more insupportable, to make us pay for hearing." Goldsmith contributed a paper on the same subject to Smollett's *British Magazine*, 1760.

69. Wilkinson (*Memoirs*, II, 218 ff.) quotes Foote's illustrative comments (about this same time) on his entertainment at Sir Francis Delaval's house: "Since my return from Ireland I have had the mortification to dine here six times, and each time a d—d large loin of pork on the table, which he calls a dinner! By G—d I'll not dine here again these three months; for I suppose he means to run his loin of Pork against the Beggar's Opera?"

69. Genest (V, 127-128) prints a dialogue between Mrs. Cibber and Mrs. Woffington, with reference to a later season, but illustrating the general situation. The conversation is concerning the entertainment of the town for the last nine years:

"Mrs. Cibber. They have been mostly amused with comic Operas, consisting of very indifferent poetry put to old tunes, without character, and scarcely any sentiment.

Mrs. W. Astonishing!

Mrs. C. And more so, when you consider that these harmonious pieces would fill houses, when Garrick and myself, in Shakspeare's best plays, could scarce pay expenses—this indeed was the principal reason of the manager's going abroad, and I think he would not have done wrong, if he had never acted till the vicious taste of the town had been entirely corrected."

69. The Carton performance is noted in *The Private Theatre of Kilkenny,* a cast of ten being mentioned.

70. Kirkman gives the receipts for nine nights of *The Beggar's Opera* in Dublin, 1763-64, from a memorandum book of Macklin (*Memoirs,* I, 461).

71. In another place Hitchcock says *The Beggar's Opera* was given fifteen nights, "once a week during most of the season." (*Irish Stage,* I, 136.)

71. Genest says Mossop opened his theatre (closed on May 19, 1765) in July "purposely for English Operas, which continued till the beginning of October." X, 482.

71. According to Hitchcock (*Irish Stage,* I, 136), "Mrs. Abington returned to Smock-alley theatre, about the middle of the Season, caused a new revolution in the Beggar's Opera; she played Polly, and Signiora Spiletta appeared in Lucy." He adds that "Spiletta got more applause, than if she had been a native."

72. So famous were the performances of Catley that a songbook, published in Dublin in 1766, was called *The Catley.*

75. This reference to the shortening of the play for acting is one of the earliest on record.

75. The *Thespian Dict.* mentions an Edward Thompson, author and actor (d. 1786), who played in *The Beggar's Opera* in 1777.

76. The *Whitehall Post* gives Oct. 17, 1777, for the first acting of this part by Mrs. Farrell.

76. Parke speaks of Mrs. Farrell as Mrs. Kennedy, but she was not married to Dr. Kennedy till 1779. As Mrs. Farrell, according to the *D.N.B.,* she had made her first appearance on the stage on Dec. 6, 1776, at C.G.

76. O'Keeffe (*Recollections,* I, 338) says of Webster's Irish performances that "he filled the houses each night he played, and was the first favourite with the ladies of fashion in Dublin; but vanity surely turned his poor head, for, when singing his love-songs, instead of addressing Polly, and Rosetta, and Clarissa, &c. on the stage, he turned his pleasing looks upon Lady this, that, and the other, in the stage-boxes."

77. An amusing statement is found in Oxberry's *Dram. Biog.* (II, 186), in a quotation from a writer at Liverpool: "Garrick played a vast round of business, but he never played Capt. Macheath or Harlequin."

77. Parke (*Musical Memoirs,* I, 11) says, "Mr. Linley produced his admired and well-known accompaniments to the original airs in the 'Beggar's Opera,' on

the 8th of November [1777] . . . several of which elicited strong remarks of science and genius, particularly those to 'Cease your Funning,' and, 'O Ponder well'; the elegant and effective oboe accompaniment to the former, finely played by the elder Parke, and the appropriate and impressive decorations to the latter by the French horns and clarionets, have been justly eulogised by foreign writers, as well as by those of this country." The newspaper notice for the performance of Jan. 29, 1779, at D.L., advertises Linley's accompaniments to the airs.

79. Compare Colman's search for novelty, to catch the public ear and eye, with the trick of Mossop, who at Smock Alley, Dublin, had produced *The Maid of the Mill,* acting the part of the hero without the songs. This is an instance of supreme distortion; but, according to Cooke, the scheme succeeded: "the *castrated* Opera run *eight* nights to crowded audiences! whilst Mossop received the flatteries of his friends, and the town, on his success in *a new department* of *acting.*" (*Memoirs of Macklin,* pp. 259-260.) Colman's experiment with *The Beggar's Opera* was not entirely original. It was the first complete reversion of cast, but individual exchanges had been made long before. In 1729 the Lilliputians had included girls in the parts of Peachum and Macheath, following the lead of Madame Violante in 1728. In 1736 (Aug. 12, at D.L.) Mrs. Slammekin had been played by Master Green. In 1744 (Dec. 28, at Hay.) Mrs. Charke had taken the part of Macheath. After that Miss Catley and Mrs. Kennedy were well-known exponents of the hero highwayman.

80. Pearce (*Polly Peachum,* p. 329) says Colman wrote this *Preludio* to introduce the novelty of the inverted cast, but the *Biog. Dram.* gives George Keate as its author. The piece was not printed.

80. Colman's connection with Gay's dramatic work included an alteration of *Polly* and a version of the poet's third opera as *Achilles in Petticoats.*

80. Remembering her Dublin successes, Catley was possibly led to perform Macheath out of rivalry with Mrs. Cargill.

81. It should be observed that this review was written during the latter part of the American Revolution; in fact, the article appeared on the very day before the siege of Yorktown came to an end.

82. The volume of *Miniature Pictures,* a 70-page 4to, contains 66 pages of quotations from *The Beggar's Opera.*

83. In the period between 1770 and 1800 a good many players on the road seem to have used *The Beggar's Opera* in repertoire.

Chapter VIII

88. The announcement of performance of Barrett's piece may be fiction, but it reflects the stage success of Gay's opera at that time.

90. Hazlitt says of this review, "It was almost the last I ever wrote with any pleasure to myself." (*Table Talk.*)

90. Miss Stephens is said to have become the Countess of Essex through her portrayal of Polly Peachum.

91. Parke (*Musical Memoirs,* II, 88) gives this anecdote: "The 'cutting down'

Gay's popular opera made a friend of Mr. Harris, the proprietor of the theatre, observe, while expostulating with him on the subject, that it was not only injudicious, but cruel. 'What!' exclaimed Mr. Harris, 'do you call it cruel to find a piece hanging, to cut it down?' "

91. The later eds., especially the so-called acting versions, show the periodic changes of the piece for the stage.

91. On November 3, 1819, the opera was played in two acts at D.L. No doubt it had become stylish to compete.

91. Hazlitt took a different view of the D.L. actor, saying in his review of September 28, 1815, "Of Mr. T. Cooke's Macheath, we cannot say anything favourable."

94. Pearce (*Polly Peachum,* p. 369) says Genest gives Nov. 4, 1820, for the first appearance of Madame Vestris as Macheath. Later (p. 372) he says Genest has her first appearance on July 22 of the same year. The latter date is correct. In both places Pearce adds that the opera had not been performed in London for seven years, whereas there is record of several performances in London for every year between 1813 and 1820. Genest, speaking of the July 22 performance at the Hay., says "not acted for 7 years," but he undoubtedly means not acted at the Hay. Even that is not exact, for there were performances at the Hay. in 1814.

96. The statement as to the original costume is apparently a mistake. See the performances of 1793 and 1816. But in 1839 the opera was again a novelty. Both long before 1816 and since, the characters had been dressed according to the fashions of the various periods in which *The Beggar's Opera* was performed. Oxenford (ed. of Oxenford and Hatton) comments on the fact that Madame Vestris herself, in her early days, "acted 'Macheath' in the frock-coat of the period. Her reforming spirit was not fairly manifested till she became directress of the Olympic, where, under the guidance of Mr. J. R. Planche, she produced little dramas, with the strictest regard to accuracy of detail, and this became more conspicuous, under the same guidance, at the larger house." Oxenford also asserts that the parts of Beggar and Player, "without whom the title of the piece is unmeaning," were "then, for the first time, revived." This last statement is to be doubted. The *Thespian Dict.* (1802) says: "It is to be remarked, that the 'Beggar's Opera,' which still continues a favourite entertainment, is generally performed without the characters of the *Beggar,* and *Manager,* which not only destroys the title of the piece, but spoils even the plot and satire." Notice the word "generally."

96. After reading of such a revival as Harrison's, and of the other important performances of Gay's masterpiece since 1800, it is somewhat disappointing to see this statement of Sarrazin (*John Gay's Singspiele,* 1898, translated): "Now *The Beggar's Opera,* even in England, is almost forgotten, although at the beginning of this century, it was produced on the suburban stages of London."

97. As a young man Reeves had performed Macheath in Dublin; and he was not through with the part in 1879.

97. Pearce (*Polly Peachum,* p. 361) says Nov. 3 was the date of the final

performance of Reeves, a statement which is clearly disproved by the performance of Nov. 10 (playbill from Mr. E. L. Gay, Boston). Pearce's reviewer in the *Athenæum* repeats the idea of a single matinée when Reeves gave his Macheath for the last time.

98. In the appendix to his ed., Oxenford prints this song from *The School for Scandal,* as used by Reeves. According to an autograph note in my copy of ed. 3 (4to), at Reeves' Liverpool performance of Sept. 22, 1879, Sheridan's "Here's to the maiden of bashful fifteen" was employed as a finale instead of song 69.

98. Mr. E. L. Gay owned the manuscript copy of the Fox orchestration. It shows that "Down among the Dead Men" was sung at the beginning of Act II, being inserted as song No. 7½, just before "Fill Ev'ry Glass." Twenty-one songs were used, including one by Polly unaccompanied, the medley (numbered as one piece), and Sheridan's song, after the words "Reprieve! Reprieve!"

98. According to the *Illustrated Leicester Chronicle,* Dec. 2, 1922, there was a performance of *The Beggar's Opera* at the Theatre Royal, Leicester, in 1887, with William Farren and Kate Vaughan. If this date is correct, Reeves' presentation of 1886, often called the last of the century, was not final.

98. The theatre advertisement of the revue performance lists *Romeo and Juliet* as the concluding piece, but the newspaper notices and reviews indicate that *The Beggar's Opera* was shifted to the end of the program. The playbill says, "To which will be added an Act of a Musical Entertainment, called The Beggar's Opera."

Chapter IX

99. Mention should be made of the intentions of Mr. William Jaggard, of Stratford-on-Avon. This patron of the drama wrote to me, under date of Sept. 26, 1914: "Gay's 'Beggar's Opera' is a brilliant old comedy which I have for a long time endeavoured to get revived here, and I now think there is a strong chance of getting it produced in our Spring Festival next April." His plans were interrupted by the war.

99. It is said, on good authority, that Mr. Nugent Monck had announced *The Beggar's Opera* for production at the Old Musick House several months before the revival at the Lyric Theatre was advertised. The performance at Hammersmith caused the other to be abandoned.

99. For information regarding this revival I am indebted to the producer, Mr. Playfair, and to Mr. Percy Heming and Mr. Alfred Heather, of the English company touring America.

100. So widespread has been the news of the modern "Rich gay, Gay rich" accomplishment that the undramatic income tax collectors have expected returns from the author of *The Beggar's Opera!*

100. The list of players at Hammersmith has been changed several times in the course of the long run, first to accommodate the American branch of the revival.

101. Two contemporary writers were false prophets on the point of revision.

H. M. Paull said in 1912 (article on Gay in *Fortnightly Review*, 97:1095), "Witty, audacious, and novel, it must yet be confessed that in this purer (?) age its production would be impossible without lavish expurgation." J. C. Hyde said in 1914 (*N. Y. Sun*), "It is safe to say that 'The Beggar's Opera' could not be presented upon the stage to-day. It might prove interesting as a reflex of the period in which it was produced, but much of the dialogue would have to be cut out."

102. For Mr. Austin's work see the musical ed. of Boosey and Co., 1920. Not all of the airs printed there, however, have been used at one time in the acted play.

103. A dinner party celebrating the three hundredth performance was held on Feb. 27, 1921, at the Hotel Cecil for Mr. Playfair and the opera company, with over two hundred distinguished persons present.

106. The extended revival is responsible for the handsome Heinemann edition of the opera, with music, illustrations by the late Mr. Fraser, and a tribute to the artist by Mr. Drinkwater.

106. The record for attendance goes to a gallery first-nighter who at the time of the second anniversary had been present at one hundred and nineteen performances. By the first anniversary, Mr. Oliver Onions, the novelist, had seen the play sixty times; by November, 1922, he had seen it over eighty times. Many people now claim attendance at fifty performances.

Chapter X

108. G. P. Upton (*Musical Pastels*) erroneously asserts that *The Beggar's Opera* was not only the first comic opera in America, but also the first musical play or opera of any kind in America. J. C. Hyde bases his article about "The First Musical Play in America" (*N. Y. Sun*) on the same mistake.

108. Hyde gives Jan. 14, 1751, for the earliest American performance, and uses that for his article.

108. The arrival of the Murray and Kean company was noted in the *N. Y. Gazette*, Feb. 26, 1750.

109. Dunlap (*Hist. American Theatre*, p. 8) is of course mistaken when he says, "On the fifth of September, 1752, at Williamsburg, Va. . . . the first performance in America by a regular company of comedians was represented."

109. Because of complaints concerning a breach of contract in the matter of door money, Kean had an explanation printed in the *Postboy*, Jan. 25.

109. Tradition says that *The Beggar's Opera* was Washington's favorite dramatic entertainment.

109. A story that has never been substantiated adds romance to the famous duel between Hamilton and Burr by making the acute cause of the fatal controversy a pretty Polly Peachum of an early American theatrical troupe.

109. Our Revolutionary forefathers may have relished *The Beggar's Opera* particularly because of its political satire, in which Gay assailed the court and the royal government as a whole.

109. A good example of performances close to the Revolution is the one at Charleston, S. C., Jan. 25, 1774.

109. Sonneck records around fifty American performances in the eighteenth century, almost a score more than Seilhamer.

112. A reading of the opera like the one by Joan had been given at Philadelphia in 1766.

113. My only authority for the two N. Y. dates in 1870 is an article in the *Boston Herald,* March 13, 1921.

114. The management of the Greenwich Village Theatre has shown its courtesy by giving me official information. Mr. Percy Heming and Mr. Alfred Heather, both of the English company, have furnished details of the N. Y. run and of the tour in Canada and the United States.

117. My review of the American production is based on three performances of the first Chicago engagement (1921), supplemented by three performances of the same English company while on tour in the central states (1922).

118. A writer in the *Evening News,* London, May 23, 1921, commenting on the experiment in America, says, "And it struck me that one way of promoting goodwill between the two countries is to send plays like 'The Beggar's Opera' on pilgrimage over there."

Chapter XI

122. For the "ingenious Quaker," Ball (Swift's *Corresp.,* II, 330) suggests George Rooke, a linen draper.

122. A ballad called "Newgate's Garland," published in broadside in 1725, has been assigned to Gay.

123. Possibly Swift wanted Gay to accept his original proposal, or was suspicious of a lyrical drama on such a subject.

123. Gay reports his refusal in the letter announcing the completion of his opera; but it is not necessary to suppose that the manuscript underwent no later revision.

125. Pope's words must not be taken to mean that Swift saw the final manuscript. He read the full play for the first time in a poor Dublin ed. See his letter to Gay, Feb. 26, 1728, *ante,* p. 40.

125. Both Congreve and Queensberry were right, but it must be supposed that they saw the doubtful side, and were surprised when *The Beggar's Opera* did "take greatly" and proved "a very good thing."

125. Broome's statement occurs in his *Journal,* under date of March 16, 1765 (Geneva).

126. Though Pope was nearly prepared to launch the *Dunciad,* Swift had no big work in hand at this time, having disposed of *Gulliver's Travels.*

126. The pun on the Newgate opera may have hinged, too, on the official terms "Proceedings on the King's Commission of the Peace, and Oyer and Terminer, and Gaol-Delivery of Newgate."

126. Boswell says, "Quin himself had so bad an opinion of it [the play],

that he refused the part of Captain Macheath, and gave it to Walker." (*Life of Johnson,* under date of 1775.)

126. Pearce (*Polly Peachum,* p. 32) tells a different story about the introduction of musical accompaniments, but gives no authority.

Chapter XII

128. Carey's *The Contrivances* (1715) was known as a musical farce; and *The Beau Demolished* (1715) is listed by Genest as a musical entertainment.

130. "Notwithstanding all the merits of this piece, it is much to be wished that it had never been written, as its success has entailed on us from that time to this, those bastard Comedies styled Operas—most of which have been miserably inferior to the Prototype, and many of them little more than mere vehicles for the Songs."—Genest, III, 224.

130. The fact that Quin, not a singer, was first selected for Macheath may indicate that the piece was not looked upon as an ordinary singing play.

131. The editor of *Modern English Drama,* commenting on the double effect of *The Beggar's Opera* in a musical way, calls attention to the fact that Gay's *The Shepherd's Week,* though intended as a parody on Philips' *Pastorals,* was read as a serious production.

Chapter XIII

133. See Pearce's theory (*Polly Peachum,* pp. 14 ff. and pp. 33 ff.) that Gay had no intention of satirizing Italian opera; one that is difficult to prove, in the light of certain evident facts. Pearce (pp. 29 ff.) has trouble in reconciling the title of Gay's piece with the proper idea of opera. He tries, therefore, to show that the term opera was then loosely applied. He does not accept Gay's own statement of the case as found in the Introduction, and conjectures that "Gay had no particular object in calling his play an opera."

133. Addison (*Spectator* paper, No. 18) says, "*Arsinoe* was the first Opera that gave us a Taste of *Italian* Musick."

134. It is interesting to notice that in 1720 Handel set Gay's *Acis and Galatea* to music, twelve years before public production, in 1732, not long before the poet's death.

138. The poem to Cuzzoni is also found in *Grubstreet Journal,* June 28, 1733; *Musical Entertainer;* and *Calliope, or English Harmony.*

138. The title-page of *The English Stage Italianiz'd* carries D'Urfey's name, but there is some doubt as to his authorship. See R. S. Forsythe's *A Study of the Plays of Thomas D'Urfey,* pp. 176 ff.

139. For four examples of Gay's previous literary ridicule, see his *The Shepherd's Week,* written in parody of Philips' *Pastorals; The What d'ye Call It,* with its parody and burlesque of Otway, Addison, and Steele; *Ode to the Longitude,* intended to ridicule a treatise of 1714; and *Verses to be placed under the Picture of England's Arch-Poet,* coarse raillery against Blackmore's poems.

140. The *Intelligencer* was a short-lived periodical, printed in Dublin and

conducted by Dr. Thomas Sheridan. The essay by Swift was reprinted, with some comment, in *Mist's Weekly Journal,* July 6, 1728, from which this extract is taken.

140. Pearce (*Polly Peachum,* pp. 14-15) declares that Johnson was no musical authority, and partly for that reason, it seems, he refuses to accept the historical fact that *The Beggar's Opera* in its own time, judged by some of its own speeches, was found to ridicule the Italian opera form. If Johnson had been the first to make the statement, the case might be altered.

141. Hawkins (*Hist. of Music,* V, 315) thinks *The Beggar's Opera* is not a burlesque on Italian opera because it does not parody the bombast and recitative, as does Carey's *The Dragon of Wantley* (1737). Recent writers, aside from Pearce, who incline to the idea of no burlesque are G. P. Upton (*Musical Pastels*) and F. and J. W. Tupper (*Representative Dramas*). The first one says that there is no burlesque or imitation; the others say that Gay's production "bears no relation to this exotic in subject, style, or form." The second statement seems an echo of Rimbault (North's *Memoires of Musick,* ed.) who says "it has not the smallest resemblance, either in subject, style, or form." Compare this quotation from George Hogarth (*Musical Drama,* Vol. II, Chapter ii): "It has been generally said that the Beggar's Opera was intended to ridicule the Italian Opera; an evident mistake, for there is not the slightest attempt to burlesque or parody the Italian dramas or music, to which it has not the smallest resemblance either in subject, style or form." Against such opinions let Gay's text speak for itself.

143. The declaration of Pearce (*Polly Peachum,* p. 15) that there is no recorded utterance of Gay, Pope, or Swift about such ridicule is not correct. For instance, see the fragment of Swift's article in the *Intelligencer,* quoted *ante,* p. 140. The statement that there is no travesty in *The Beggar's Opera* from beginning to end is not at all final. Pearce's own quotations from Gay's piece (*Polly Peachum,* p. 23) seem inconsistent with his previous assertions.

143. Gay may have intended to submit the antithesis of poor man's opera versus rich man's opera. His contemporaries could hardly fail to see such a contrast, both in name and in general materials. At heart, the great mass of the English people did not care for Italian opera, which had been fastened on them, like a parasite, by the upper classes who did not understand Italian much better than the rank and file. The Muses themselves, tired of the foreign product, had let a beggar write a piece to suit himself.

143. Examples of similes, in the order of mention in the Introduction, occur in the text of the play, pp. 34, 5, 17, 12, and 8. Some of them are used more than once.

144. According to Hawkins (*Hist. of Music,* V, 310), Cuzzoni already had the favor of the public when Faustina arrived in England in 1726. Faustina excelled Cuzzoni in powers of execution, but both women, with their different styles of singing, had their own special followers. The contrast was desirable to the directors, but Handel kept Cuzzoni in the background, hoping to dispose of her. The women later came to an actual fight. Finally the directors,

to settle the matter, raised Faustina's salary. Cuzzoni, ensnared into a promise to refuse less pay than her rival, was obliged to leave the kingdom. Faustina was still in England in 1728, singing in the operas which competed with Gay's piece that spring—*Admetus* and *Siroe.*

144. The two Italian singers and their quarrel are also ridiculed in a satire called "The Devil to pay at St. James" (1727), attributed to Dr. Arbuthnot. See *Life and Works,* Aitken, p. 123.

144. *The Opera of Operas* (1733), a musical version of Fielding's *Tom Thumb,* has a conclusion in close imitation of Gay's reprieve. After Tom is cast up by the cow, Sir Crit-Operatical exclaims, "Wond'rous, astonishing Plot! more sudden than the Reprieve in the *Beggar's Opera.*" Gay was indulging here in pure take-off; for the purpose of mock-tragedy and burlesque, to kill Macheath would have been just as funny as to preserve him for his many wives.

146. It may not have been a freak of fate that caused Gay to use for the robbers' drill in Act II one of the tunes of Handel, who was to suffer much more than the politicians from the effects of the play. The introduction of one of the famous composer's operatic airs in such a scene might be more or less of an insult.

146. A notable example of operatic burlesque is Lucy's song of revenge, Act III, Sc. vii.

146. It is possible that the imagery of song xvi of Act I, with its figures of "Greenland's Coast" and "Indian Soil," is a shadow of operatic foreign setting.

146. A letter to the *Craftsman,* March 11, 1732, has this interesting comment: "You must know, Sir, that our Operas have been in a declining condition some time. . . . The Managers in this Distress have agreed to patch up their differences, and to look out for some Performers, who might regain them the favour and good Opinion of the Town." Busby (*Hist. of Music*) says, "In 1740, the Italian opera was seen in a comparatively humble state, displaying her dimmed attractions."

147. Hawkins (*Hist. of Music,* V, 316) says "the Beggar's Opera ran 63 nights while the operas of Richard I, and Admetus were at the Haymarket to thin audiences." The opera of *Tolmeo Re d'Egitto,* produced on April 30, was performed only seven times.

147. Since King George held shares in the Royal Academy of Music, Gay's operatic attack might be said to have the effect of political satire. It is interesting in this connection to know that Lady Walpole was a follower of both Cuzzoni and Faustina, and had even engaged them to assist her in a concert at her house.

147. "The Competition" was also printed in the *London Journal,* April 13. The air is the same as that used by Gay for song xi in Act I.

153. *Admetus* (June 1) was the last opera performed under the Royal Academy of Music.

153. "For Italian music, William Hogarth had about as much respect as John Gay, and was therefore so well pleased with a subject which threw it into ridicule, that he not only painted it three times, but has in several of his miscel-

laneous prints made these *senseless sounds* one great object of his satire."—John Ireland, *Hogarth Illustrated,* II, 342.

Chapter XIV

155. As late as 1773, a political pamphlet in the form of a play was called *The Bow-street Opera.* It satirized Fielding and Wilkes, both of whom had some unpleasant notoriety in connection with *The Beggar's Opera.*

156. Linley composed a good many of the airs in *The Duenna* and selected others from Dr. Harrington and Rauzzini. The popular airs are few in comparison.

Chapter XV

157. John Christopher Pepusch (1667-1752), a native of Berlin, came to England in 1688. At the time of the production of *The Beggar's Opera* he was musical director at L.I.F. Consequently he was called upon to adapt the music for the play; and he did, besides, considerable work in connection with eds. of the music alone. He also arranged the airs in *Polly,* and seems to have dealt with several other ballad operas. The overture to *The Wedding,* by Hawker, bears his name. Pepusch's previous connection with Italian opera makes his assistance of Gay doubly interesting. In 1718 he had married Margherita l'Epine (the first Italian singer of prominence in England), who was doing concert work in London at least eight years before Pepusch came from Prussia. Before that time he had often been engaged in working over the foreign music for the English stage. His *A Short Treatise on Harmony* (1731) was a significant contribution to the theory of his day. His twelve cantatas were his principal compositions. Carey has verses "To Dr. Pepusch" in his *Poems on Several Occasions,* 1729.

157. Pearce (*Polly Peachum,* pp. 62-64) suggests that Gay may have been assisted at times by Arbuthnot, but gives little credence to the theory of Pepusch's aid. Pepusch would relish his technical assistance of Gay, however, if we may believe the rumor that he had a personal dislike for Handel. As a business rival of the composer, and an opponent of the Royal Academy, he would also naturally be sympathetic toward any attempt to stem the Italian tide, though he had previously been occupied with foreign music. Even if unfamiliar with English balladry, he would be, nevertheless, as a practical musician for a London theatre, close to the common people.

158. Hawkins is inaccurate in three points: the overture was not published in the first ed., and, like the airs, it was not always printed in subsequent copies; the opera does not consist *solely* of ballad tunes and country dances. See the list of songs traced in section II of this Appendix.

158. The German ed. of Calmus (1912) throughout deliberately implies a sole responsibility for the music on the part of Pepusch, and discusses his humor and taste in the choice of tunes, his attempt at parody, and his musical characterization of personages in the plot. Poor Gay is left almost entirely out of the matter.

159. For examples of incidental music see p. 23, "A Dance a la ronde in the French Manner," to the French tune played by the harper; and p. 54, "A Dance of Prisoners in Chains." Elsewhere the music of the closest song seems to have been used, as on p. 58.

159. One air, to "Cease your Funning," is possibly Welsh. See *ante*, Appendix section II. The *Daily Journal* review of 1728 says, significantly, though not exactly, that there were introduced "instead of Italian Airs, about 60 of the most celebrated old English and Scotch Tunes."

161. All the songs have been translated into French and German, in connection with the whole play; and several have been rendered into Latin.

161. John Addison, editor of the music of *The Beggar's Opera*, around 1830, says that Walker "was capable of giving just effect to the words of the songs, and as most of them are complete epigrams, that must always be the chief excellence of their delivery."

161. Sometimes the songs seem to have been judged by too serious standards; for example, in E. B. Reed's *English Lyrical Poetry*, p. 344: "Of the many songs in this opera (and we may include those in *Polly* and *Achilles*) there is not one marked by fancy or by delicacy of rhythm; of imagination or passion there is not the slightest trace. The only possible praise to be given them is that they are vivacious and well suited for music. They bear the same relation to the songs of the Elizabethan dramatists that the pickpockets and women of the town who sing them bear to Rosalind and Orlando."

Chapter XVI

165. Several later writers, like Fitzgerald and Wheatley, have accounts similar to Angelo's, but their information apparently goes no farther back.

166. "The Modes of the Court" is the forty-fourth song. If Cooke means the "first song" in the play, he has failed to write "Through all the Employments of Life."

166. Fortescue was a school-fellow of Gay at Barnstaple.

166. Several later writers, like Oxberry and Fitzgerald, repeat the information given by Cooke, but their source does not precede his statement concerning Lady Townshend. The songs here assigned to other writers are thus marked in marginal pencil notes in a copy of an ed. of 1772 at the Bodleian Library.

167. Burton makes the plain misstatement (even in 1880) that "the opera that carried him [Gay] to the tomb of the illustrious is only known to those who are curious to know the nature of the performance that took the town by storm."

168. Christopher Bullock was a brother of the Bullock in the *Beggar's Opera* cast.

168. The second ed. of *A Woman's Revenge* appeared on March 14, just one month after the first ed. of *The Beggar's Opera*. (Book-list for March in *Monthly Chronicle*.)

168. *The Revenge* was a version of Marston's *The Dutch Courtezan*, 1605, revived under the new title in 1633.

168. Pearce (*Polly Peachum,* p. 175) suggests D'Anvers as the author of the dedication because some additional material supposed to be by him is printed along with the play.

168. "Your Mother acts the Part," etc., must be an allusion to Mrs. Fenton and her daughter, Lavinia.

169. *The Prison Breaker* was intended for L.I.F. Sarrazin makes the mistake of saying it was presented on the stage there.

172. The comparison with Steele's play was suggested to me by Professor G. H. Nettleton, and is mentioned by him in his discussion of Gay's piece, *English Drama,* p. 192.

173. Wild was at last convicted, under the new act, for having received money for recovering stolen goods without catching the thieves, and so followed many of his rogues to the gallows. Not long before, his life had nearly been taken by a dissatisfied member of his gang, one Blueskin, who had attempted to cut Wild's throat in the courtroom. Blueskin, or Joseph Blake, was a pupil of Wild, and like Filch had been trained up to the business from childhood. It was this incident which gave rise to the ballad of "Newgate's Garland."

173. Long before Fielding attempted his own account, based on the true history of the thief-taker, Defoe wrote up the adventures of Wild.

175. Defoe wrote a biography of Sheppard in 1726.

176. Chrysander (*G. F. Handel*) far-fetches a resemblance between Macheath and Robin Hood.

176. See *Memoires of Monsieur Du Vall,* London, 1670. It has even been suggested that Gay's Macheath finds its original in this celebrated character.

177. Ainsworth, in his novel called *Jack Sheppard,* invents a visit of Gay to Newgate, and to Sheppard himself, then in prison there. The robber even suggests the writing of *The Beggar's Opera!*

Chapter XVII

178. A letter from Gay and Pope to Swift, dated Nov. 17, 1726, contains this statement about *Gulliver's Travels:* "The politicians to a man agree, that it is free from particular reflections, but that the satire on general societies of men is too severe. Not but we now and then meet with people of greater perspicuity, who are in search for particular applications in every leaf; and it is highly probable we shall have keys published to give light into Gulliver's design."

179. It should be remembered that the abridged versions of the nineteenth century softened the satire to a considerable degree.

180. "Two great Ministers" is a clear reference to Walpole and Townshend. It is interesting to know that the present London revival has been attended freely by such statesmen as Mr. Balfour and Mr. Lloyd-George. The *Daily Telegraph* has asked why it appeals to the politicians. Perhaps the following quotation from Hazlitt (*Lectures on English Poets,* No. vi) may serve as an answer: "The very wit, however, takes off from the offensiveness of the satire;

and I have seen great statesmen, very great statesmen, heartily enjoying the joke, laughing most immoderately at the compliments paid to them as not much worse than pickpockets and cut-throats in a different line of life, and pleased, as it were, to see themselves humanised by some sort of fellowship with their kind."

180. Swift had satirized the court, the ministry, and parliament in his *Gulliver's Travels.* The Dean would keenly relish Gay's attack in the same directions, as well as the general roguery of personal allusions.

181. *Cf.* Lecky's description of Walpole: "In society he had the weakness of wishing to be thought a man of gallantry and fashion, but he was rendered ludicrous by a singularly corpulent and ungraceful person." (*Hist. of England.*)

182. The view here taken is opposite to that of Pearce (*Polly Peachum,* Chapter XV), who sees a serious attack on *The Beggar's Opera.* D'Anvers was no other person than Nicholas Amhurst, who, with the aid of Bolingbroke and Pulteney, used the *Craftsman* to assail the government of Walpole. Amhurst was originally a Whig, but after being expelled from Oxford in 1719 he went to London and soon became a prominent pamphleteer on the side of the opposition. By 1725 his political crusade had attracted considerable attention. Gay may not have been a friend of the journalist, and may have incidentally received mention that was not complimentary; but there is little evidence that D'Anvers would be likely to take spite on the author of the newest dramatic success in London. Coxe, writing the life of Gay in 1796, says of *The Beggar's Opera* that "if even he [Gay] did not intend it as a satire against the Minister, yet the author of the Craftsman, a political paper on the side of the opposition, drew, with all the virulence of party and great keenness of wit, a ludicrous comparison between the Minister and Locket, whom he called the keeper and prime minister of Newgate, and quoted several passages of the ballads, as applicable to statesmen and courtiers." Perhaps D'Anvers played a considerable part in making the political satire of the opera understood by the people at large.

182. *"Five Hundred Friends." Cf.* Gay's fable of "The Hare and Many Friends," and Pope's line in the *Dunciad,* "Gay dies unpension'd with a hundred friends."

183. *Cf.* with Swift's defense this statement by Spence (*Anecdotes,* p. 160): "He [Gay] was remarkable for an unwillingness to offend the great by any of his writings; he had an uncommon timidity upon him in relation to any thing of that sort. And yet you see what ill luck he had that way, after all his care not to offend." In spite of such "uncommon timidity," however, Gay exhibited real nerve by risking *The Beggar's Opera* on the stage.

186. "Knew how to *stop* it." As a matter of fact, the court did retaliate the very next season. See Chapter XX.

186. Walpole had previously been the object of Gay's satire, but he had the courage to attend the new performance. The fact that he applauded is not proof that he saw no satire there. On the contrary, it is as good evidence that the Minister saw the stroke and chose to ignore it, or counteract its effect by applauding to show that he could take none of the truth to himself. A parallel

instance may be found in the case of *Cato*. Dr. Johnson (life of Addison) says, "The Whigs applauded every line in which Liberty was mentioned, as a satire on the Tories; and the Tories echoed every clap, to shew that the satire was unfelt."

186. It is probable that the applause did not come because the people had sympathy for Walpole, but because they were delighted to see him forced to encore the attack on himself. An earlier account of this affair, substantially the same, is given by F. Gentleman, *Dramatic Censor,* Vol. I, 1770. Gentleman considers Walpole the one "against whom Gay chiefly brandished his pen." See a similar opinion, *ante,* p. 245.

187. Macklin, who was present on the first night, and who was a member of the second regular cast, was probably a good authority for such information.

187. According to Coxe's *Memoirs of Walpole* (1768), between 1725 and 1730 the two ministers were frequently in dispute, and in 1727 they came close to a rupture; but the date of the noted quarrel referred to by Cooke is given in Coxe's similar account as 1729. See Vol. I, pp. 332 ff. If this is true, *The Beggar's Opera* could in no way be indebted to the special incident, although former differences between Walpole and Townshend were probably available. In a note to his ed. of Hervey's *Memoirs* (I, 117), Croker mentions this incident at Cleveland Court, but refers it back to Coxe, who dates it 1729, and to Lord Mahon, who assigns it to 1730, the year of Townshend's resignation. Croker favors the latter year, but adds that "it is certain either that the date of the historians is an anachronism, or that Gay alluded to some earlier dispute, or that the story was made from the scene."

189. The play was later used for satire of which Gay never dreamed. However highly specialized in 1728, the political passages were general enough to be applied variously down through the eighteenth century. "In the next generation, it was twisted into satirising Lord Sandwich for im-'peaching' Wilkes to the House of Lords, in the matter of the Essay on Women, while No. 45 of The North Briton was agitating the House of Commons."—Mrs. Parsons, *Garrick and His Circle,* page 184. An "Extract of a Letter from Oxford," printed in the *St. James's Chronicle,* March 29, 1774, tells how the writer, on calling for the "Court Kalendar," was given the "assize Kalendar," in which were the names of common rogues. The sketch concludes: "And oh! strange to tell, I opened the first Leaf of the Beggar's Opera, Price 2d, and instead of the Dramatis Personae, the careless Villain ["the rascally Bookseller"] had slipped in a list of the Privy Council, which was also intended for the Court Kalendar."

189. Swift's letter to Sheridan was written in the same year in which the Dean may have looked over Gay's shoulder while the dramatist was busily engaged on *The Beggar's Opera* at Twickenham.

189. The Princess was then under three years of age. She became Queen of Denmark, but died at twenty-seven, eight years after her marriage.

190. Gay, who must have had dreams of some day gaining the position of poet laureate (an office which, on the side of merit, he deserved ahead of Cibber when the place did become vacant in 1730), was now in a proper frame of

mind for writing a "beggar's opera." The tremendous success of the play, however, must have been a pleasant antidote. Yet in the very brilliance of the comedy is reflected Gay's mature disappointment,—disappointment appropriate enough in view of his politics and his previous satire.

190. The appearance of Walpole's responsibility is considerably weakened when we remember that Gay's position of lottery commissioner, to which he had been appointed in 1722, and reappointed after the libel incident had blown over, was held until 1731, even after the prohibition of *Polly*.

191. Why Gay was deprived of his lodgings and yet allowed to hold his lottery post is inexplicable.

191. A year before (March 20, 1728) Gay had written to Swift: "In about a month I am going to Bath with the Duchess of Marlborough, and Mr. Congreve; for I have no Expectations of receiving any favors from the Court." He could hardly have hoped for any after *The Beggar's Opera*.

192. In his political attacks Fielding seems to have followed the example set by Gay, and for that reason it is not well to slight the earlier antecedents of the censorship.

194. Before Gay exposed the current evasion of justice, Alexander Smith, in his life of Wild (1726), complained of the open toleration of scoundrels of this type.

194. Swift would have written for Macheath a different last speech to his men, according to a letter to Gay, March 28, 1728: "I wish Macheath, when he was going to be hanged, had imitated Alexander the Great when he was dying: I would have had his fellow-rogues desire his commands about a successor, and he to answer, 'Let it be the most worthy,' &c."

195. A broadside ballad in the B.M. (dated 1741 ?) definitely connects the name of Bob Booty with the fall of Walpole: "The Sturdy Beggars hearty Prayer; Address'd to the admirable Collosus of the Sun. To which is added, *Bob Booty's lost Deal* or the Cards Shuffled fair at last."

196. Lecky speaks of the gross sensuality of Walpole's conversation. In one place he says, significantly for a comparison here: "When he did not talk of business, it was said he talked of women; politics and obscenity were his taste." (*Hist. of England.*)

196. Swift throws some doubt on the dramatist's original intention when he says, in a letter to Gay, March 28, 1728: "I did not understand that the scene of Lockit and Peachum's quarrel was an imitation of one between Brutus and Cassius, till I was told it." This can be taken in two ways. Swift refers to a parody on the quarrel of the Roman leaders, in which the situation and the reconciliation are much the same, or he uses Brutus and Cassius as figurative names for Walpole and Townshend. Whatever his real meaning, he implies that Gay had not told him of any such allegorical significance, although a confidence of this sort would have been likely. In view of any attempt to draw a parallel, it is interesting also to notice that Jonathan Wild, the prototype of Peachum, had an open rupture with his partner in thief-taking, one Hitchin, a marshal of London. The two men severed their business connections, but later came

together after Hitchin was suspended from his office by the Lord Mayor. (*Newgate Calendar,* 1840.)

Chapter XIX

204. Justice Fielding's attempt at prohibition of the performances at both C.G. and D.L. in 1773 suggests that the burlesque element may have almost died out, or was being overlooked. See *ante,* pp. 244 ff.

204. The writer of *A Sop in the Pan,* 1759, says that "half the Ridicule in *Hudibras* and the *Beggar's Opera* (which I presume you allow to be Burlesque Productions) would be lost, if the Author had not plac'd the *Agents,* in these Pieces, in the lowest Life."

205. Gay may also have included glances at pathetic tragedies of the type of Rowe's *The Fair Penitent,* or similar plays by Otway and Southerne.

207. Sarrazin (*John Gay's Singspiele,* p. xv) finds that the songs reveal the new sentimental and moralizing tendency; but he seems to have mistaken the burlesque for a serious presentation of the love element.

207. "The Romance you lent me." *Cf.* Mrs. Peachum's speech, "Those cursed Play-books she reads have been her Ruin."

207. "Suspect my Honour," etc. *Cf.* Shakespeare's "Doubt thou the stars are fire," etc. *Hamlet,* II, ii, 116.

Chapter XX

209. Gay says, "I passed five or six months this year at the Bath with the Duchess of Marlborough; and then, in the view of taking care of myself, writ this piece." (Letter of Dec. 2, 1728.)

211. In view of Gay's own statement concerning the official edict and the time of his call on the Lord Chamberlain, the following newspaper paragraph gives a curious suggestion, not easily explained except on the basis of mere rumor: "We also hear from the same Place [Theatre Royal, L.I.F.], that two eminent Actors of the said House have lately attended his Majesty with a Second Part of the Beggar's Opera, in order for his Majesty's Approbation."—*British Journal,* Saturday, Nov. 30, 1728. Notice the date.

212. In his letter to Swift on Dec. 2, 1728, Gay says that *Polly* "was almost ready for rehearsal; but Rich received the Duke of Grafton's commands (upon an information that he was rehearsing a play improper to be represented), not to rehearse any new play whatever, till his Grace has seen it. What will become of it I know not; but I am sure I have written nothing that can be legally suppressed, unless the setting vices in general in an odious light, and virtue in an amiable one, may give offence."

213. If the ministry wished to deny representation to the further work of Gay, with the ban on *Polly* it practically accomplished its purpose, for he died without having seen anything more of his own come on the stage except a revival of *The Wife of Bath* (1730), and *Acis and Galatea* (1732).

214. *The Beggar's Opera* apparently had not been officially read in advance,

and it would possibly have been a difficult, as well as an undiplomatic, procedure to stop a production after it had been allowed performance and had achieved distinct popularity. The original opera, however, could never have evaded the licensing act of 1737 if it had been submitted for reading after that time; also, if it had been the sequel to an acted *Polly* it might have been the play suppressed.

214. Brooke's play, like Gay's sequel, was at once published by subscription and sold widely, mainly by the author's friends.

215. Henry Angelo (*Reminiscences*, I, 26) says, "Rich, the manager, whom my father well knew, had engaged to bring it [*Polly*] out at Covent Garden, was sadly chagrined at this prohibition, as he had reckoned much upon its success." Of course Angelo has the wrong theatre. Covent Garden playhouse was not built by Rich till three years later. Several writers make the same mistake, including Whincop (corrected by Victor), Baker (*Companion to Playhouse*), and Genest.

215. The idea that the town was hardly dealt with in the suppression of *Polly* is supported by the passage from the *Craftsman* (January 11, 1729) already quoted, *ante*, p. 44.

217. Gay wrote to Swift on March 18, 1729: "I print the book at my own expense, in quarto, which is to be sold for six shillings, with the music." The Queensberrys no doubt agreed to stand good for the bill of the publisher.

218. Oxenford (ed. of Oxenford and Hatton) makes the mistake of saying the Queensberrys withdrew in disgust after the ushership incident. In this he follows *Companion to Playhouse*. Fitzgerald (*Hist. Eng. Stage*) erroneously tells how the Duchess was forbidden the court because she was an ardent patron and advocate of *The Beggar's Opera*. In this he follows *Companion to Playhouse* and Ryan (*Table Talk*). Molloy (*Life of Woffington*) makes a similar mistake. Parsons (*Garrick and His Circle*) varies the story in saying the Duchess was forbidden the court for protesting against the prohibition of *Polly*. As a matter of fact, she had bothered the court in presenting Gay's side of the argument, even offering to read the play to King George himself to prove its innocence; but the breach came with the affront of taking orders for the book in the very shadow of the throne.

219. Several writers have placed the *Polly* prohibition in 1729, doubtless having confused the date with that of publication.

219. Pearce (*Polly Peachum*, p. 252) has incorrectly named the Duchess of Queensberry as the one who paid £100 for a single copy of *Polly*.

219. The bookseller's price was 2s. 6d., according to the periodical advertisements. Notice that Gay's letter to Swift says 6s. See note to p. 217.

220. In his letter of Aug. 11, 1729, Swift may have referred to profits from both *The Beggar's Opera* and *Polly*.

220. Gay's sisters revived the lawsuits after his death, obtained judgment, and received a considerable amount of money in settlement. Arbuthnot (letter to Swift) speaks of about twenty cases pending as early as May, 1729.

220. Nettleton (*English Drama,* pp. 193-194) has an excellent summary of the broad social satire in *Polly*. A part of it is quoted *ante,* p. 198.

223. Since much is made in *The Beggar's Opera* of the transportation of criminals to the American plantations, Gay followed a legitimate thread of fictitious narrative in bringing his characters across the sea. A curious accidental forecast of his own sequel is found in a satirical letter to *Mist's Weekly Journal,* May 4, 1728, near the close of the first season: "We are well informed, that the celebrated Critick Mr. Dennis is coming out with a Dramatick Entertainment, entitled, The Second Part of the Beggar's Opera, wherein will be represented the whole Bench of J—— singing in Chorus:—with the grand Dance round the Coal Fire. N. B. Macheath, for the Diversion of the Company, is to be hang'd in Chains,—and poor Polly to be transported to Paris."

224. The *Whitehall Post* review (June 21, 1777) says *Polly* was presented "with some slight alterations, and a few additional airs." Oulton (*Hist. of Theatres,* I, 64) tells how Colman "made several alterations, and greatly improved the piece, as well in the colloquial as in the musical part." Genest says that "on this revival, some new songs were introduced instead of the old ones, and some things in the dialogue were omitted, but the alterations were not material." V, 583. The word "revival" is hardly correct. The text was again altered by Horace Smith for Michael Kelly's production on June 16, 1813.

225. In his introductory note to the musical ed. of *Polly* (Boosey and Co., 1922) Mr. Austin says: "Mr. Clifford Bax has largely reconstructed the play itself—a proceeding held to be necessary before successful performance was possible."

Chapter XXI

226. Nichols (*Lit. Anecdotes,* II, 403) says of Boswell: "He had also a design, which was in some forwardness, of publishing a quarto volume, to be embellished with fine plates, on the subject of the controversy occasioned by the Beggar's Opera; and it is to be regretted that the publick were not gratified with a perusal of what so good a judge of human nature would say on so curious a subject. With this particular view he had paid frequent visits to the then truly humane 'Governor of Newgate,' as he ordinarily styled Mr. Kirby."

226. There were other sermons dealing with the evils of *The Beggar's Opera,* like that later on by Arthur Bedford, of St. Botolph's, Aldgate, but Herring's, mention of which has been prominently recorded, seems to have had distinction.

227. Several historians and biographers speak inexactly about a sermon against *The Beggar's Opera* by the Archbishop of Canterbury.

227. The *D.N.B.* says, "The archbishop, who was a thorough whig, made himself conspicuous by his zeal for the Hanoverian family, not only in sermons. . . ." The fact that Herring assaulted Gay's piece with great vehemence while ignoring many plays of loose morals is almost evidence of a political motive.

228. The editor of the Pyle-Kerrick correspondence (Albert Hartshorne) has this note: "That this sparkling play should have been advanced to the dignity

of condemnation in a sermon by his Grace of York is sufficient testimony to its extraordinary popularity."

228. Pearce (*Polly Peachum,* p. 160) incorrectly places Swift's reply "a year after the famous sermon was preached."

229. W. Clark Russell, the novelist, thinks Herring led a numerous party against the piece. (*Representative Actors.*)

229. The letter to the *London Journal* was written by William Duncombe, who is said to have gained by his zealous communication the acquaintance and lifelong friendship of Dr. Herring. Duncombe was the author of an unsuccessful tragedy, *Lucius Junius Brutus,* performed at D.L. in 1734.

238. The motto on the title-page of *Polly,* a quotation from Horace, contains the idea of poetic justice which the sequel so accommodatingly secures.

238. In considering *Polly* necessary to complete the "moral," Oulton evidently forgets the element of burlesque; but even a late writer like Sarrazin (*John Gay's Singspiele*) also feels that the ending of *The Beggar's Opera* is unsatisfactory because it lacks poetic justice.

244. A portion of the article from the *Gentleman's Magazine* appears in Dodsley's *Annual Register,* 1773.

245. Ryan (*Table Talk,* 1825, I, 26 ff.) gives a pretty full account, however accurate, of the Colman-Fielding correspondence.

247. Miles was the author of two comic operas, *Summer Amusement,* partly by Peter Andrews, performed at Hay. in 1779, with music by Dr. Arne, Dibdin, Arnold, and others; and *The Artifice,* performed at D.L. in 1780, with music by Michael Arne. His letter to Fielding won the friendship of Garrick, who used his influence to obtain for Miles a civil appointment in the navy.

249. George Hogarth (*Mus. Drama,* II, Chapter ii) says of Thompson's production, with apparent regret, "The audience, however, did not approve of this homily being tacked to their favourite display of blackguardism; and the piece was damned accordingly."

253. Johnson's idea that the play had no moral purpose was approved by Sir Walter Scott.

259. Hazlitt's review of Oct. 23, 1813, is included almost exactly in *Lectures on English Poets,* No. vi. The following additional passages, even more extravagant in their praise, are found in the latter work: "But his capital work is his Beggar's Opera. It is indeed a masterpiece of wit and genius, not to say of morality. In composing it, he chose a very unpromising ground to work upon, and he has prided himself in adorning it with all the graces, the precision, and brilliancy of style. It is a vulgar error to call this a vulgar play. So far from it, that I do not scruple to say that it appears to me one of the most refined productions in the language. The elegance of the composition is in exact proportion to the coarseness of the materials: by 'happy alchemy of mind,' the author has extracted an essence of refinement from the dregs of human life, and turns its very dross into gold."

259. Hazlitt's quotations from the play are usually not verbally exact. He is

either writing from memory or using a current version of the theatre. See *ante,* p. 90.

260. In urging the preventive effect of *The Beggar's Opera,* Hazlitt harks back to the idea of Swift's article in the *Intelligencer.*

266. Very few voices have been raised in modern protest against *The Beggar's Opera.* Some controversial matter has been carried in the papers, but no important attack has been encountered. In the main, the resurrected opera has been swallowed whole, without sticking in the throat of any public moral code. One of the best counter thrusts has been the confession of one who styled himself a "country parson" and signed his letter "Little Levite" in the *Yorkshire Post,* Nov. 12, 1921:

"I journeyed over 40 miles to see 'The Beggar's Opera.' Months ago I made up my mind I would go, even if it meant bankruptcy. As I could not possibly return home the same night, it has proved a costly pleasure. I do not, and never shall, regret the expense. Somehow or other I believe I ought to have been at a diocesan conference, but I am quite sure 'The Beggar's Opera' did me far more good than forty diocesan conferences."

269. The newspapers of 1720 seem to be as full of criminal items as those of any other year in the century.

Chapter XXII

272. Byron was wrong about Gay's personal lampooning of character. Gay did not wish to put living politicians and others directly on the stage; he left that to Fielding and Foote. *The Dramatic Poetaster,* London, 1732, thus complimented Gay as one who held the mirror up to nature in general:

> "A crime, from various splendid Knaves, he drew;
> The features group'd, (delightful all, and new:)
> Thus form'd his *Characters,* or thief or jade,
> And set them high, in strong, plebeian shade."

274. The character of Macheath has often been misinterpreted. Cooke (*Memoirs of Macklin,* p. 58) criticizes Webster for making Macheath too much of a gentleman. Wheatley (*Hogarth's London,* pp. 312-313) says that Walker did not make Macheath a town beau or a gentleman, implying that the latter would have been inappropriate. If too much stress is laid on the roughness of Macheath the best satire will be considerably weakened. The Captain is a man of culture, capable of quoting Shakespeare in a tavern scene,—a reserved and unaffected leader who has even refined the phrases and the actions of his subordinates.

274. Admirers of Polly will do well to refuse to own the character portrayed in Gay's sequel. There she is no longer winsome; her glory has departed, and we hardly connect her with the original heroine.

280. By "the same Kind" Cibber may mean burlesque; it is plain that ballad opera had not been "often attempted" before 1728.

280. The songs are thus distributed: Act I, 18; Act II, 22; Act III, 29, counting separately the airs of Macheath's medley, ten in number.

281. Certain writers have found in the recent performances of *The Beggar's Opera* many qualities Gilbertian. The point is good, but the terminology is not. Gilbert, rather, was Gayan. The first ballad opera furnished the original sources of both the Gilbertian method and the Sullivanic style.

281. For examples of influential features, see the drill of the highwaymen, the cotillon of the women of the town, and the dance of the prisoners in chains.

281. In considering Gay's contribution to the custom of shorter dramatic forms, we must not overlook the previous effect of pantomimes and miscellaneous small entertainments. We should also remember that the songs of *The Beggar's Opera,* by lengthening the time of representation, would partly balance the decrease in dialogue or the division into fewer acts.

282. It is interesting to read what Boswell records in his *Life of Johnson* under date of 1778: "Sir Joshua Reynolds. 'The Beggar's Opera affords a proof how strangely people will differ in opinion about a literary performance. Burke thinks it has no merit.' Johnson. 'It was refused by one of the houses; but I should have thought it would succeed, not from any great excellence in the writing, but from the novelty, and the general spirit and gaiety of the piece, which keeps the audience always attentive, and dismisses them in good humour.' "

IV

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